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THE AESTHETIC DOCTRINE OF MONTESQUIEU

ITS APPLICATION IN HIS WRITINGS

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF UNIVERSITY STUDIES OF THE JOHNS HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY IN CONFORMITY WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

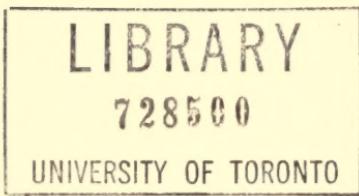
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TO

R. H. W.

—“Ore ai trovet ço que tant avons quis.”

PREFACE.

The present study was undertaken from a desire to acquire familiarity with the writings of a great Frenchman, and with the purpose of discovering his artistic ideas, of determining his strictly literary value. The desire has been satisfied, but the purpose remains only partly fulfilled. It was hoped that his Aesthetic Doctrine could be made the kernel of a treatment which would include a thorough study of Montesquieu's style, of his setting, of his precursors and influence. Especially was it hoped that there would be opportunity to engage in the fecund criticism of his general ideas.

The writer has not abandoned all hopes of completing this treatment, for which much material has been already collected. During two years, Montesquieu has been the thing most prominently before him; one does not quit a great thinker so easily. At present, however, in view of the specific demands of dissertation-writing and other circumstances, it has seemed best to submit only what may prove, it is trusted, a tolerably exhaustive and rounded presentation of the Doctrine. A final chapter on application has been added, to point, at least, along other paths.

Thanks are due for courteous assistance to the officials of the Library of Congress, of the British Museum and of the Bibliothèque Nationale. More especially would the writer speak in grateful acknowledgment of the encouragement given and the allowances made by his two very considerate referees.

E. P. D.

(April, 1906.)

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ABBREVIATIONS.

- A. and I. = Arsace et Isménie.
C. de L. = Causeries du Lundi.
E. L. = Esprit des Lois.
G. D. R. = Considérations sur les Causes de la Grandeur et de la Décadence
des Romains.
Hist. Vérit. = Histoire Véritable.
L. P. = Lettres persanes.
M. or Mont. = Montesquieu.
Mél. in. = Mélanges Inédites.
P. and F. = Pensées et Fragments.
S. and E. = Sylla et Eucrate.
T. G. = Temple de Gnide.
V. à P. = Voyage à Paphos.
Voy. = Voyages de Montesquieu.

BOOK I.

PROLEGOMENA.

CHAPTER I.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

The edition used is certainly the best, and the one which at present is considered definitive—that of Edouard Laboulaye, 7 vols., Paris, Garnier, 1875–9. (For contents of this, see at end of Bibliography.)

The present list includes only those works actually quoted or referred to in the following pages.¹ Among these, the criticisms of Sainte-Beuve, Brunetière, Faguet, the biographies of Vian and Sorel, the more recent studies of Doumic, Lanson, Barckhausen, and Saintsbury, and the great work of Taine, have been found of special service.

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- IV. 1–474, *l’Esprit des Lois, Books xi–xxi.*
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- 323–330, “Montesquieu et la censure.”
- 331–333, “Note sur l’ouvrage inédit de Montesquieu intitulé sur les *Finances de l’Espagne.*”
- 335–505, “Table analytique et alphabétique.”
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183–196, *Notes sur l'Angleterre.*
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CHAPTER II.

INTRODUCTORY.

Modern criticism justly demands some account of a writer's artistic ideas, before proceeding to a determination of his literary worth. That is partly in fairness to the author's aims, partly in elucidation of his individual expression. From either point of view, or else from its historical interest, more perhaps than from its intrinsic value, a study of Montesquieu's Aesthetic Doctrine may prove worth while.

No such study has been undertaken—indeed hardly a complete successful attempt has been made to discuss Montesquieu's importance and rank strictly as a *littérateur*.¹ Much has been written on him from the standpoints of jurisprudence, of political science, and of philosophical history. We have biographies, commentaries, polemical treatises. But we have only general essays and chapters on his unique position in French letters, his occupation of the debatable lands between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. It will be part of our task to indicate that position, while rendering more precise that distinction.

By way of prelude, some setting forth of the capital points in regard to the man and his mind, his period and his precursors, seems indispensable. There are certain well attested facts and generally accepted theories that may give a warranted *a priori* conception of his doctrine.

It will be well to bear in mind on the one hand, such names as

¹The word is used here designedly in a limited sense. The admirable work of M. Sorel (*Grands Ecrivains* series) comes as near as any to the standpoint that I have in mind. But that naturally, besides its brevity, is more general and biographical. The tendency has been to regard our author as still greater in the field of European thought than in that of French Literature. (*Brunetière, Et. Crit.*, iv, p. 265.)

Montaigne, La Bruyère, Macchiavelli, such points as the sway of classicism and the influence of philosophers; on the other, to remember the eighteenth century contempt of religion and the eighteenth century fetish of formalism, the predominance of head over heart, of manners over morals, the license of the Regency, the reign of the *salon*, of woman, of conversation—the popularization of knowledge, the beginnings of method, the dawn of cosmopolitanism, the constant appeal to “good sense” and “good people.” For his own part, we cannot insist too strongly on his manysidedness. We have in his life, successively and interfused, the libertine, the man of the world, the man of taste; the observer of manners, the traveller, the country gentleman; the student and the thinker; the legist, the economist, the natural scientist, the historical philosopher. For his ideas, we have a strong tendency towards the positivist and utilitarian point of view, which considers religion as a *ressort* and sentiment a superfluity;¹ but we have kindly sympathies² and charitable impulses.³ There is the desire of order, and the love of liberty—the impartiality which admits despotism⁴ or Bayle,⁵ with the independence which admires genius,⁶ extols England⁷ and severely criticises Louis XIV.⁸ None so quick to rail against *esprit*,⁹ and none so ready to use it. An enlightened prophecy¹⁰ wars with the credulity of an *arriéré*. Shrewd common sense¹¹ contrasts with the noblest judgments.—Finally, he is an aristocratic humanitarian—which phrase, if any, may give his definition, his limitations, and his *faculté maîtresse*.

¹ VII, 150—“J’ai été dans ma jeunesse assez heureux pour m’attacher à des femmes que j’ai cru qui m’aimaient; dès que j’ai cessé de le croire, je m’en suis détaché soudain . . . n’ayant jamais eu de chagrin qu’une heure de lecture n’ait dissipé.” Cf. VII, 152.

² VII, 153—“Je suis amoureux de l’amitié.”

³ Cf. *inf.*, p. 11.

⁴ E. L., *passim*, *Arsace et Isménie*.

⁵ V, 125; VI, 152–3.

⁶ Cf. *inf.*, pp. 53, 81.

⁷ IV, 343–356; VII, 183–196.

⁸ I, 144–5; VII, 166.

⁹ = wit, cf. *inf.*, p. 89 f.

¹⁰ VII, 194—“je crois que si quelque nation est abandonnée de ses colonies, cela commencera par la nation anglaise.”

¹¹ Disposition of his wine—his law-suits.

The very moderation of his mind, that tolerance which is perhaps its prime characteristic, blurs his positive traits and causes us to doubt any definite fixed system. As a matter of fact, he has many systems, numerous as his sympathies.¹ Impelled towards a limited monarchy by his admiration for England, by his love of a machine perfect in checks and balances, by his aristocratic leanings, he is yet disposed toward democracy by his consideration for the race and his contempt of political liberty. This is a major instance of his magnificent trimming, though it is not the only one. He believed few things absolutely. The best government, he holds, is that which best suits its people ; and laws are relative to occasions and circumstances.

He was an observer in the field of social and psychological phenomena. He has appreciated the Cartesian method in a striking way, and that same method may have inspired and partly governed his own procedure. Animated by the spirit of intellectual curiosity, that "noble inquiétude"² which propels towards knowledge, he turned first to the natural sciences and then to the domains of history and politics, in search always of the fruitful fact, leading inductively to the sound principle. He was not sufficiently rigid. Not all of his facts will bear scrutiny—indeed he condemned detail in itself³—and not all of his generalizations are sufficiently founded, or, again, of the highest import. Where he comes nearest truth is on the comfortable middle ground, equally remote from the highest philosophy and the minutest technical knowledge, but the ground of sane, wise, almost every-day observation and experience, unified into maxims and secondary principles. He chose the better before the best, the opportune and the possible before the remote ideal.⁴

His human value, his human instincts are the points on which I must insist. To vary the *mot*, he loved humanity and humanity *le lui a bien rendu*. This is seen in such things as his opposition

¹ He has himself furnished another apology for what must often seem at first mere contradiction and inconsistency. (*P. & F.*, II. 25.) Cf. *inf.*, p. 120.

² VII, 17.

³ As in the case of his dislike for legal procedure. (VII, 152.) Cf. *inf.*, p. 105.

⁴ St.-Girons, *Essai*, p. 101.

to slavery and to the cruelties of the penal code.¹ Ste-Beuve finds in the *Esprit des Lois* too much faith in human nature, a tendency towards that “défaut radical” of an easy optimism.²

This human touch led him to manifestations of generosity in his life and actions. The trait is sufficiently shown in his help of Piron and of the Marseilles boatman.³ Yet he was “aimable avec sécheresse et bienfaisant avec hauteur.”⁴

With feeling, the case is again different. He felt as far as this common humanity called for and no whit further. Of sentiment or *sensibilité* there is hardly more than a trace in his life or his writings. For others he was sympathetic—“je n’ai jamais vu couler de larmes sans en être attendri.”⁵ But for himself, the stoicism which he so admired,⁶ together with his essential worldliness, forbade the search or the indulgence of the feelings.

“Ma machine est si heureusement construite, que je suis frappé par tous les objets assez vivement pour qu’ils puissent me donner du plaisir, pas assez pour qu’ils puissent me causer de la peine.”⁷

The worldliness and cautiousness, “la peur d’être dupé,” which prevented free expression, appear particularly in the latter part of his life, when he regretted some of his earlier *boutades*, sought more for tempered statement, and became generally more of a conservative. But tradition was always a force which he was ready to respect. That is why he clung to classicism, to monarchism; and hence his famous recommendation to touch laws only “d’une main tremblante.”

His fondness for antiquity, which is the last of his greater traits, springs more or less from the same disposition of mind.⁸ This antiquity which so enchanted him,⁹ which inspired him to write

¹ Beccaria, *Tratatto dei delitti e delle pene*, largely derives from M.’s views on this subject.

² *C. de L.*, VII, 68, 76.

³ Cf. Vian, pp. 170, 337–8. An anecdote which has furnished the subject of no less than four plays.

⁴ Brunetière, *Rev.*, p. 79.

⁵ VII, 153.

⁶ V, 130–1.

⁷ VII, 150.

⁸ Doumic would also credit him with a taste for things exotic, with a natural cosmopolitanism. (*Voy. de Mont.*, p. 927).

⁹ VII, 158.

his first juvenile work to show that his beloved pagans were not damned, which proved a guiding taste throughout his life, will come in for abundant comment later on.¹

Such seem the prime characteristics of a nature as complex and manifold as the century itself. It will already be seen what difficulties beset our path. If it is no easy task to bring order and derive sure principles from a period so smooth on the surface, so intricate in its depths; if it seems perilous to evolve leading forces in the career of a writer who touched life at so many points: we may be sure that it is far harder to find and verify a symmetrical system of aesthetics whose component parts are scattered over thousands of pages, usually disjointed, often hasty judgments, not always deducible from his own basic views, and seldom subservient to the canons of orthodox and technical criticism.

To attribute unvarying consistency and immovable order to the author of *l'Esprit des Lois* would seem futile. Much less can one expect to find these qualities when he writes in a domain not peculiarly his own, to which indeed his one formal contribution² in no wise exposes all his theory or constitutes the starting point for all his deductions. At any rate no attempt will be made to create harmony where harmony is non-existent. Whatever of conformity, cohesion or clearness may be found in the following pages will be there as the result not of invention but of arrangement and coördination.

Closely connected with the thinker's claim to be held an artist, and an aesthete—a claim which must in the end be upheld or dismissed³—arises the other old question of the definition and boundaries of art itself. We shall see that Montesquieu conceives broadly of the term and vaguely of its limits. If in the course of the discussion it becomes necessary to assume a more precise position or a better based standpoint, this will be done with due regard to the ranking allowed on his part to art's relatives and subordinates. When modern opinions are still bewildered and irrecon-

¹ Cf. *inf.*, pp. 49, 125.

² *Essai sur le Goût.*

³ Cf. *inf.*, pp. 201-3.

citable, we cannot look for absoluteness from an eighteenth century philosopher.

A last reserve must be taken against any universal sincerity of his utterances. The French leaning for epigrams,¹ well pronounced in our author, must at times have led him into exaggerations and, once more, inconsistencies. He was not exactly addicted to posing. But he was a lover of vigorous statement² and, in his youth, decidedly *frondeur*.

Before passing on to the material, it may be well to give two cautions as to the divisions and procedure of this study. The plan, except in broad aspects, cannot be wholly logical, since it must largely follow the material; and in following the material, in its intricate interrelations, many repetitions of statements and principles have seemed unavoidable for full treatment. Hence a host of cross-references and foot-notes. But the effort has nevertheless been made to give each leading principle its special handling in its proper place.

¹ Cf. *inf.*, p. 118.

² Cf. *inf.*, p. 195.

CHAPTER III.

THE MATERIAL.

Several thousand references to things more or less artistic have been collected. These are unequally distributed in the various writings, the bulk of them being found in the Collection Borde-laise, the *Lettres persanes* and the *Essai sur le Goût*. In the *Romains* there is almost nothing, and in *l'Esprit des Lois* much less than one would expect from so catholic a treatise. The character of these works is too well-known to require comment. In his lighter productions—*Temple de Gnide*, *Voyage à Paphos*, *Arsace et Isménie*, etc.—the interest centers chiefly on the application (or extension) of his principles, and accordingly these *jeux d'esprit* will more appropriately come in for comment in the final chapter. His *Letters*¹ help us but little—though evidently what we find here contains most of frankness and brings most conviction. The *Pensées diverses* and the *Notes sur l'Angleterre*, fruitful in many things, contain a respectable quantity of pertinent matter. But it is in the three titles first named that we are to look for the most numerous and probably the most significant and characteristic expressions on the subject. We may take these in chronological order.

The *Lettres persanes* are said to have been nine years in the writing² and to have been carefully revised four or five times. That their author subsequently regretted their publication,³ that he considered them a sin of his youth,⁴ is beyond doubt. But it is

¹ "Sa correspondance n'offre qu'un médiocre intérêt n'était le grand nom qui la signe, il ne vaudrait réellement pas la peine de la lire."—Brune-tière, *Rev. des 2 mondes*, XXXIII, 224.

² Vian, p. 53.

³ Especially when they stood between him and the Academy.

⁴ Cf. *inf.*, p. 189.

also beyond doubt that they adequately and frankly express that youth, in all of its liberty and *libertinage*, its raillery, scepticism and iconoclasm, its contemptuous clear-sighted vision and its power of representation. The book has been held to deepen in thought towards the close,¹ and it is just in these later letters that much of our matter lies.² On the whole, one is bound to abide by the *Lettres persanes* as giving Montesquieu's full and free *dicta*—not quite 'juvenile', but not altogether mature—especially on literary subjects.

The *Essai sur le Goût* is proposed for the *Encyclopédie*—where in curtailed form it was later published³—in a letter to d'Alembert of 1753.⁴

"L'esprit que j'ai est un moule ; on n'en tire jamais que les mêmes portraits . . . Ainsi, si vous voulez de moi, laissez à mon esprit le choix de quelque article ; et si vous voulez, ce choix se fera chez Madame du Deffand avec du marasquin . . . moi je ne puis pas me corriger, parce que je chante toujours la même chose. Il me vient dans l'esprit que je pourrai prendre peut-être *Goût*, et que je prouverai bien que *difcile est proprie communia dicere.*"

This is rich in suggestion. It would seem, first, that he alludes to the *Goût* as an old paper, which had probably been lying in his desk for some time. Vian thinks—though apparently without definite proof—that it was largely composed at Florence in 1728.⁵ There is a letter⁶ from Florence of that year, in which Montesquieu extols the fine arts and declares that his eyes are just opened to their beauties. This is to be taken with special reference to painting and sculpture, concerning which the *Goût* has much to say. Perhaps then the composition of the paper may be referred to the period of his visit to Italy, or to a time shortly afterwards, when the memory of the visit was still fresh.

The fact that d'Alembert obtained the sketch only after Montesquieu's death, and states⁷ that it was "trouvé imparfait dans ses

¹ "A mesure que le livre avance, le ton s'élève, les questions graves sont touchées"—Faguet, *XVIIIe siècle*, p. 153. Also Sorel, p. 36—Yet the worst of the harem affair is at the end. Cf. *inf.*, pp. 191, 194.

² I, pp. 416–427.

³ Tome VII, 1775. The last four divisions were subsequently added.

⁴ VII, 421–2.

⁶ VII, 226–227. cf. *inf.*, p. 55.

⁵ P. 122, but cf. p. 314,

⁷ *Eloge*, XXXIV.

papiers”¹ hardly indicates a later date. But it does show that the final revision never took place. Consequently, while we are to consider the *Goût* as the product of a maturing mind,² it cannot be held to contain his last deliberate judgments.

This lack of finish, together with the difference in date, will partly account for the discrepancies between the views advocated here and those of the *Lettres persanes*. Whatever may have been true of 1753, his mind in the preceding years cannot have been the changeless “mould” he thought it. We are unable, in spite of Vian,³ to take this incomplete and often irrelevant⁴ sketch as the basis of Montesquieu’s aesthetic system. Never does he see art steadily and see it whole. One fourth of the discussion is devoted to women—apparently as exponents and examples of creative “beauty.”⁵ He plays with other abstractions. “Variety,” thinks Vian,⁶ is “son grand principe.” Villemain⁷ notes rather “une préférence marquée pour cette finesse délicate, pour ces pensées inattendues, ces contrastes brillants qui éblouissent l’esprit.” In order to avoid the reproach contained in the phrase *communia dicere*, he enunciates many strange and striking thoughts which we shall abundantly encounter.

The best part of the material really comes from the *Collection Bordelaise*.⁸ The recent publication of this Collection—extending from 1891 to 1901—has given rise to much interest and comment. It is known that for the last century persistent efforts have been made to approach and give to light the posthumous writings of Montesquieu. Finally his descendants have consented to the

¹ “L’auteur n’a pas eu le temps d’y mettre la dernière main ; mais les premières pensées des grands maîtres méritent d’être conservées,’ &c. VII, 113.

² *Aet.* 31 in 1728.

³ P. 314.

⁴ “There is hardly any definite reference to literature at all.”—Saintsbury, *Hist. of Crit.*, p. 513 ff.

⁵ This may be the effect of Mme. Deffand’s “marasquin.” He says elsewhere (iv, 312)—“La société des femmes gâte les moeurs, et forme le goût.”

⁶ P. 314.

⁷ *Eloge*, p. 67.—“Ces subtils raffinements qui déparent quelquefois le style de Montesquieu sont dictés par un système.” If this is true at all, certainly no such complete system can be derived from the *Goût*.

⁸ See Bibliography.

publication, and the best part of the mss., under adequate collaborative editorship, have now appeared.¹

The Collection consists largely of a record of the President's travels; his fragmentary writings; and a host of reflections on all possible topics, systematically arranged under appropriate headings by his editors. The value of these volumes has been variously judged. Ste-Beuve, who would have given the *Esprit des Lois* for the *Voyages*,² finds himself at odds with the best critical opinion on the actual publications. "Puisque nous avons les livres, à quoi bon les carnets?" demands Doumic, and proceeds to declare that only the *Pensées et Fragments* bring us anything really new on Montesquieu, the man and his mind.³ Lanson is of the same opinion for the bulk of the *Mélanges inédites*.⁴

Whether or not the whole collection is really important—and on the side of its significance much of course may be said—there can be little doubt that for the purposes of the present study, it is in the highest degree valuable. Its body furnishes a larger amount of æsthetic and literary comment than will be found in all of Montesquieu's previous works put together. This comment, with the exception of a treatise on the Gothic and some tolerably connected remarks on the Florentine and Roman galleries, is still mainly in fragmentary form.

The portions of the Collection which chiefly concern us are: (1) the treatise *De la manière gothique*;⁵ (2) the artistic observations made in Italy, especially those on Florence;⁶ (3) the sections devoted to *Lettres et arts*, in the *Pensées et Fragments*.⁷

The first of these, which will be more fittingly criticised later,⁸

¹ There are still two apparent exceptions—the *Spicilegium* or record of our author's readings, and some familiar Letters. An edition of the latter is promised by M. Céleste.

² *C. de L.* VII, 61.

³ Doumic, *Rev. des 2 mondes*, CXLI, 925.

⁴ *Rev. univ.* 1893, p. 386. But cf. p. 391. Brunetière had already emitted a prophecy just contrary to that of Ste-Beuve (*Et. Crit.* IV, 244).

⁵ *Voy.*, II, 367–375.

⁶ *Voy.*, I, *passim*—esp. pp. 155 ff., 226 ff.; *Voy.*, II, 3–126 (*Voyage en Italie, suite*); *Florence, Voy.*, II, 301–363.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 3–79. This is almost entirely devoted to literary discussions.

⁸ Cf. *inf.* p. 71.

is only an *ébauche* on the Gothic style, containing at the end some disjointed remarks on the Orient and on knowledge generally. Montesquieu's editor thinks that these were added "après coup," and that the whole text was written shortly after or during his Italian travels.¹ Much of it is identical with portions of *Florence*, and this seems the part most carefully corrected.

The amount of criticism, more especially of description, on the plastic arts is seen to be considerable in quantity. It was written nearly entirely with reference to his Italian journey, since the *Voyage en Allemagne*² contains practically nothing, and the *Notes sur l'Angleterre*, already known, are all the record that we have of his residence in England. This artistic comment was largely written on the spot, immediately after visits to the various galleries, where he was under the guidance of cicerones.

Most important of all are the *Pensées* on Literature. These, which contain much of his wiser and saner views, differ in some cases from his presumably earlier utterances,³ showing once more that his mind was no invariable *moule*.

It may be well to give the divisions by which his editors have classified these scattered thoughts.⁴ This will show the range of the observations :

1. Langage et Langues
2. Ecriture
3. Art d'écrire
4. Genres littéraires
5. Littératures diverses
6. Auteurs anciens
7. Auteurs du XVI^e Siècle et du XVII^e
8. Auteurs du XVIII^e Siècle
9. Livres à faire
10. Esthétique

¹ *Voy.*, II, xvii-xviii. (*Description des MSS.*)

² *Voy.*, II, 129-216.

³ In the *Goût* and the *L. P.*

⁴ There is much repetition, both as between this and the *Goût*, and elsewhere. In such cases, I have chosen throughout for quotation what seems the fuller or preferable reading.

11. Musique

12. Arts plastiques.

It has been remarked that much of the Collection,¹ and much of what this study will draw therefrom is fragmentary in character. Accordingly, it will be best, returning to the *Goût*, to seek mainly in that the generalizations and principles which will form the necessary beginning of an æsthetic theory. What our author has to say on the value and object of art, its qualities and relations, as well as on taste itself may prove of some interest and value.

¹ Most of the articles are labelled as *brouillons*.

BOOK II.

ÆSTHETIC DOCTRINE—PRINCIPLES.

CHAPTER IV.

ART—DESCRIPTION AND DIVISIONS.

With Montesquieu the terms ‘art’ and ‘arts’ are of the widest inclusiveness. He has left no direct definition of the word. We would formulate one, drawn from his conception and usage, somewhat as follows : the arts in general are those products of skill and invention which furnish pleasure and utility to humanity. This is the thesis. The mechanical and industrial arts should aim at utility, while the fine arts will bring both, though more doctrinally pleasure. He has, in the rough, made this division :

“ Je suppose, Rhédi, qu'on ne souffrit dans un royaume que les arts absolument nécessaires à la culture des terres, qui sont pourtant en grand nombre ; et qu'on en bannit tous ceux qui ne servent qu'à la volupté ou à la fantaisie . . . ”¹

In the domain of utility he applies the word in such uses as the art mechanical,² the art military³ or naval,⁴ the art of logic,⁵ of legal procedure,⁶ of medicine.⁷ All of these are permissible uses.⁸ So is the employment of the word in the sense of skill or address,⁹ as the art of commanding,¹⁰ of dissimulation,¹¹ of bankers,¹² of ornament,¹³ and even of genealogy¹⁴ or of soothsaying.¹⁵ But Montesquieu leaves the legitimate meanings when he extends the mechanical signification and makes *art* equivalent to *industrie*, as Laboulaye has noticed¹⁶ : “ L'ouvrier qui a donné à ses enfants son

¹ I, 337. ² I, 362 ; III, 128. ³ III, 317 ; IV, 441, 443. ⁴ IV, 443.

⁵ V, 405. These references might be indefinitely extended.

⁶ V, 347, 368. ⁷ I, 420 ; V, 401. ⁸ Littré, s. v. ⁹ Littré, s. v.

¹⁰ I, 219 ; II, 423. ¹¹ I, 216 ; II, 377. ¹² V, 24. ¹³ I, 117 ; 203.

¹⁴ I, 412. ¹⁵ II, 362. ¹⁶ V, 72 ; 78 ; IV, 266.

art pour héritage.”¹ Elsewhere it very nearly denotes manufactures.² It is even broadened sufficiently to signify *métier*.³ In the discussion between Rhédi and Usbek, ‘art’ is taken first as meaning ‘invention.’⁴ On the other hand, *artisan* is used as equivalent to *artiste*⁵ and to *ourrier*.⁶ These latter divergences will serve to show the economist’s point of view.

Of the other kind of arts, we find a further division in the introduction to *Goût*:⁷

“La poésie, la peinture, la sculpture, l’architecture, la musique, la danse, les différentes sortes de jeux, enfin les ouvrages de la nature et de l’art peuvent . . . donner du plaisir.”

He refers elsewhere to the arts of criticising⁸ and of declamation.⁹ But in these instances the word has more than a savor of its sense of skill. With such possible exceptions and with the above inclusion of poetry, it is to be noted that he does not class literature formally as among the arts. In enumerations, in fact, the two are contrasted.¹⁰

By the inclusion of gaming and dancing in the category cited, we can see that he makes little distinction between the *beaux arts* and the *arts d’agrément*. And the reason therefor is seen in his statements of the object of art, in the technical sense :

“La perfection des arts est de nous présenter les choses telles qu’elles nous fassent le plus de plaisir qu’il est possible ;”¹¹ . . . “les beautés des ouvrages de l’art, semblables à celles de la nature, ne consistent que dans les plaisirs qu’elles nous font.”¹²

This is evidently his sincere and lasting belief.

¹ v, 112, cf. II, 135, where the terms are used in alternation.

² *P. & F.*, I, 162; *P. & F.*, II, 214.

³ v, 438.

⁴ I, 331-2. The invention of powder and of the compass. Also *P. & F.*, II, 196, cf. IV, 185—“des machines que l’art invente.”

⁵ III, 161. In I, 338, a painter (artist) is called an *artisan*.

⁶ I, 336; I, 159—“Il n’y a pas jusqu’ aux plus vils artisans qui ne disputent sur l’excellence de l’art qu’ils ont choisi.” On the other hand, the mere observer is a *vil artiste* (VII, 53).

⁷ VII, 116.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 26.

⁹ VII, 93.

¹⁰ VII, 93—“les sciences partout encouragées, les arts protégés, les belles-lettres cultivées.”

¹¹ VII, 118.

¹² VII, 123.

CHAPTER V.

ART—ITS OBJECT, ORIGIN, VALUE AND RELATIONS.

He has developed this idea of pleasure—which ranges from amusement to *volupté*—quite sufficiently. He even excludes as unessential the vision of a “present utility” in things beautiful; if they bring pleasure that is enough.¹ But in theorizing still further he declares that of the two kinds of men, those who think and those who amuse,² he personally will choose the former.—“Il ne s’agit pas de faire lire mais de faire penser.”³ This, however, is a late and very lofty ideal. For the most part he recognizes—as who in the eighteenth century did not?—the necessity for relaxation and varied stimulus even in his most thoughtful works.⁴ As for his lighter labors they are designedly replete with what Taine calls the two chief literary condiments of the century—scabrous *galanterie* and the old *esprit gaulois*. Montesquieu himself has said it: “Vos recherches vous feront lire des savants; et un trait de galanterie vous fera lire de ceux qui ne le sont pas.”⁵ It will be interesting to remember this when we come to criticize the *Lettres persanes*.

If it is true then that the soul is made for thought,⁶ it is also true that the same soul comes out strongest in its pleasures.⁷ This soul is capable of enjoying three kinds of pleasures: its own, or the spiritual variety; the physical sort; and those springing from habit.⁸ “Les sources du beau, du bon, de l’agréable, etc., sont donc dans nous-mêmes; et en chercher les raisons, c’est chercher les causes des plaisirs de notre âme.”⁹ This is the subjective-objective standpoint. But those pleasures which are peculiar to the independent soul are such ideas as curiosity,

¹ VII, 115.² VII, 173.³ IV, 58.⁴ The curious “Invocation aux Muses” in the midst of *E. L.* (iv, 359–60.)⁵ VII, 284.⁶ VII, 120.⁷ VII, 116.⁸ VII, 115.

aspiration, generalization and analysis.¹ Both the spiritual and the physical are natural pleasures, as opposed to the acquired.² Yet a distinction is superfluous, since taste is concerned indifferently with all alike.³

All this would square with his belief that pleasure can be reasoned;⁴ and where it is not founded on reason, it should at least depart therefrom as little as possible.⁵

The principle of amusement which holds for art in general holds for its kinds as well. If pleasure and art are so intimately associated, if they are united on more than one occasion almost as syntactical doublets,⁶ we are informed in detail that “l'art de nous plaire” is the goal alike of gardens⁷ and of geniuses;⁸ of music and of dancing;⁹ that the best writers are those who have pleased most;⁷ that *belles lettres* are read for agreeable surprises.¹⁰ It is true that he deprecates the part of raillery and badinage, particularly in conversation.¹¹ But who is so prompt to agree, in principle and practice, that relaxation counts for much in any work?¹² In a notable passage,¹³ where he gives reasons for preferring art to reality, the superiority in each genre is that of pleasure-giving capacity.

We have given this as a constant attitude. It is only fair to add that there are just glimpses of a forward step and a nobler view, as when he tells the Muses,—“Vous n'êtes jamais si divines que quand vous menez à la sagesse et à la vérité par le plaisir.”¹⁴ Of course, as to actual results, this is the spirit that has largely dominated him. But we are dealing here with professed theory.

The question arising inevitably after such a prelude is: What

¹ VII, 116.

² VII, 117.

³ Which seems a poor conclusion after so much philosophizing. There is much half-baked thought and abstract bathos in the *Goût*.

⁴ “Souvent notre âme se compose elle-même des raisons de plaisir.” VII, 131.

⁵ VII, 143. ⁶ VII, 130, 140. ⁷ VII, 130. ⁸ VII, 129.

⁹ I, 57. ¹⁰ VII, 129. ¹¹ VII, 178.

¹² It is necessary to “délasser le lecteur.” Apology for the “Invocation,” IV, 359.

¹³ *P. & F.*, I, 290—quoted *inf.*, p. 30, n. 5.

¹⁴ IV, 360. This whole “Invocation” is rich in material and suggestiveness.

value can be attached to a thing whose principal end is amusement? This question he has attempted to answer; and in the answer we shall see the conflicting standpoints of the utilitarian and of the *homme du métier*.

The main arguments are presented in the debate between Usbek and Rhédi.¹ The latter first submits the thesis:—

“Tu m’as beaucoup parlé, dans une de tes lettres, des sciences et des arts cultivés en Occident. Tu me vas regarder comme un barbare : mais je ne sais si l’utilité que l’on en retire dédommage les hommes du mauvais usage que l’on en fait tous les jours.”²

This has reference to “arts” in Montesquieu’s broadest sense; Rhédi develops it for invention particularly.³ But Usbek’s reply, by equivocation or *ignoratio elenchi*, refutes the objection for the fine arts particularly, though he still includes the industries.

It seems a good plea. He declares:—

“Ou tu ne penses pas à ce que tu dis, on bien tu fais mieux que tu ne penses. Tu as quitté ta patrie pour t’instruire ; et tu méprises toute instruction ; tu viens pour te former, dans un pays où l’on cultive les beaux-arts ; et tu les regardes comme pernicieux. Te le dirai-je, Rhédi? je suis plus d’accord avec toi,⁴ que tu ne l’es avec toi-même.”⁵

This emphasizes the educative value. He continues: “As-tu bien réfléchi à l’état barbare et malheureux où nous entraînerait la perte des arts?” We would be no better than monkeys, who yet may be passable creatures among barbarians.⁵ Shall we then consider the example of these primitive peoples, who have counted for power and profit only after they have learned the arts?⁶ As to inventions, their evil effects must be only occasional, else humanity would not suffer them.⁶ And as to the supposed softening of races and the fall of empires:

“Tu parles de la ruine de celui des anciens Perses, qui fut l’effet de leur mollesse⁷; mais il s’en faut bien que cet exemple décide, puisque les Grecs qui les

¹ *L. P.* Letters cv–cvI. These passages, like the “Invocation” and the satire on writers (Letters cxxxiv–cxxxvII) are most important for us.

² I, 331.

³ I, 331–3. Cf. *sup.*, p. 21, n. 4.

⁴ i. e., ‘with your better judgment.’ It should be remembered that Usbek is generally considered to speak largely for Montesquieu.

⁵ I, 334.

⁶ I, 335.

⁷ i. e., as first and principal cause—unconnected with arts. But cf. *inf.*, p. 27.

vainquirent tant de fois, et les subjuguèrent, cultivaient les arts, avec infiniment plus de soin qu'eux.”¹

Here is an excellent argument :

“Quand on dit que les arts rendent les hommes efféminés, on ne parle pas du moins des gens qui s'y appliquent, puisqu'ils ne sont jamais dans l'oisiveté, qui, de tous les vices, est celui qui amollit le plus le courage. Il n'est donc question que de ceux qui en jouissent. Mais comme, dans un pays policé, ceux qui jouissent des commodités d'un art sont obligés d'en cultiver un autre, à moins de se voir réduits à une pauvreté honteuse, il suit que l'oisiveté et la mollesse sont incompatibles avec les arts.”¹

Paris is one of the most pleasure-loving cities in the world and one of the most industrious.¹

A direct statement of the importance of the arts is that if one banished those of pleasure and fancy,² our condition would be most miserable. They are truly needs. Without them the State would dwindle and the people perish.³ For the division of labor, the circulation of wealth and the progression of revenues are closely related to the existence and interdependence of the arts. They require little capital and are proportionately productive. For the maintenance of a State, its people must have their *délices*; and superfluities count for as much as absolute necessities.³

It is easily seen what type of mind would evolve these considerations. None has expressed it better than Faguet⁴ in declaring that it is the economist alone who speaks. Montesquieu states absolutely that the knowledge of arts useful in a way to mankind is subordinate to the “grand art qui forme et règle les sociétés.”⁵ The ancients, his constant model, cherished the sciences and protected the arts; but the things of government were their cult.⁶ It is here a question less of a necessary basis, which could hardly be disputed, than of a free individual preference.

There are fragments elsewhere voicing a defence similarly restricted. Much of his approval has been for the arts in general, under which head he includes most of the products of civilization. It is true that he classes these as ‘needs’ and as associated with

¹ I, 336.

² *Ibid.*

³ I, 337-8.

⁴ *XVIII^e siècle*, pp. 141-2.—See *inf.*, p.

⁵ *P. & F.*, I, 102.

⁶ *P. & F.*, I, 103.

needs.¹ It is true that he grants a usefulness even for *belles-lettres* —which is significant :

“ Les livres de pur esprit, comme ceux de poésie et d'éloquence, ont au moins des utilités générales ; et ces sortes d'avantages sont souvent plus grands que des avantages particuliers.”²

Without such usefulness *beaux esprits* become puerile.³ In Japan,⁴ with a flux of articles, there will be more material for the “arts,” more men at work, more paths to power.⁵

This is well and excellent commercially. “ C'est la nature du commerce de rendre les choses superflues utiles, et les utiles nécessaires.”⁶ In Sparta, the State was left resourceless without these arts and their companions.⁷ “ L'on voit toujours marcher d'un pas égal les arts, les connaissances et les besoins.”⁸ Such signs of progress are commended for the times of the great Louis⁹ and the great Peter.¹⁰ In Turkey, “ ces barbares ont tellement abandonné les arts, qu'il ont négligé jusqu'à l'art militaire.”¹¹ Finally, “ la différence qu'il y a entre les grandes nations et les peuples sauvages, c'est que celles-là se sont appliquées aux arts et aux sciences, et que ceux-ci les ont absolument négligés.”¹²

But the counter-evidence is heavy and to the point. Such encouragement as a believer in civilization can give he has bestowed ; such reserves as we would expect from an exponent of soundness and normality in the body politic he has yet to take. Even as to the Spartans he observes¹³ that their very limitations in productive fields led to a period of grandeur and glory. Empires generally have been founded in ignorance of the arts.¹⁴ For the Romans he is of course all admiration. And the Romans were notably inartistic.¹⁵ They possessed and needed only one art, that

¹ II, 34, 134 ; IV, 272.

² VII, 81. This is in a *Discours Académique*, the deliverances of which do not necessarily import sincerity or carry conviction.

³ I, 142.

⁴ It is not essential, in regard to the countries, to call his facts into question.

⁵ IV, 395.

⁶ III, 154.

⁷ IV, 272.

⁸ VII, 93—his reign showed “ les arts protégés, les belles-lettres cultivées.”

⁹ I, 184—“ il s'attache à faire fleurir les arts.”

¹⁰ I, 99.

¹¹ VII, 76.

¹² III, 154.

¹³ I, 332.

¹⁴ II, 109. They particularly scorned the theatre, II, 238.

of war, to maintain their heroism and integrity in the midst of riches and corruption—"ce qui n'est, je crois, arrivé à aucune nation du monde."¹ This is the first deduction, for us, from that blinding passion for antiquity,² whose strange prepossessions will be noted in abundance. Again, in China he finds such a plethora of life that rigid economy is essential. "Il faut qu'on s'attache aux arts nécessaires, et qu'on fuie ceux de la volupté."³ Under other circumstances he has identified these two classes. Now he commends, with Tacitus, the admirable simplicity of the Germans, who procured their ornaments not from art but from nature.⁴

Finally, one may form an estimate as to his valuation of the arts from a passage in the *Lettres*—a passage immediately following his statement of how his eyes were opened aesthetically in Italy.⁵

In passing to the next subject, of the causes and relations of art, we discover still more to impair his view of its value. For its *provenance* is simple and direct : "L'effet du commerce sont les richesses ; la suite des richesses le luxe ; celle du luxe, la perfection des arts."⁶ Also the two together are among the "biens sans nombre qui résultent de la vanité : de là le luxe, l'industrie, les arts, les modes, la politesse, le goût."⁷ He associates thus constantly the two ideas ;⁸ and hence it is an easy step from the superabundance of luxury to the perniciousness of the arts. The best passage in the *Temple de Gnide* is the description of Sybaris,⁹ whose inhabitants know no difference between pleasure and necessity. There all stimulating and disturbing arts are banished ; awards are given to the discoverers of new pleasures ; "et les faveurs des dieux sur Sybaris ne servent qu'à encourager le luxe et la mollesse." Again, the Vandals "languissaient dans la volupté ; une table délicate, . . . la musique, la danse, les jardins,

¹ II, 197, 120.

² For the oratorical, conventional, *grand* antiquity. Cf. *inf.*, p. 163.

³ III, 280.

⁴ IV, 288. He calls constantly for simplicity, almost as opposed to art (*e. g.*, I, 333). But is it not, as Faguet divines, a *simplicité voulue*? See *inf.*, p. 166, n. 9.

⁵ VII, 227—"A mesure que les goûts dominants commencent à s'affaiblir, on se dédommage par un grand nombre de petits goûts." Among which small tastes the plastic arts are apparently to be included.

⁶ IV, 402.

⁷ IV, 313.

⁸ IV, 397.

⁹ II, 34.

les théâtres leur étaient devenus nécessaires.”¹ Corruption and arts were spared the ancient Germans² and together would ruin China.³ Even in healthy Greece, the “artisans” were, before the decline, denied the rights of citizenship.⁴ Singularly enough one exception, and that not the most obvious, is allowed to this deteriorating influence: music is held, historically and actually, to soften manners.⁵ It connects spirit and body and excites the gentler passions. “On ne peut pas dire que la musique inspirât la vertu; cela serait inconcevable:⁶ mais elle empêchait l’effet de la féroce de l’institution, et faisait que l’âme avait dans l’éducation une part qu’elle n’y aurait point eue.”⁷ Yet while it mitigates it does not weaken; “de tous les plaisirs des sens il n’y en a aucun qui corrompe moins l’âme.”⁸

As to literature, general corruption in a realm will affect that branch also. And the great *ouvrages d'esprit* can hence appear only in the beginning of monarchies.⁹ This dictum is but a sign of that slighting tone concerning the age of Louis XIV, which marks our author and indeed his period.

Thus it is seen that while luxury and art are not necessary correlative, they are frequent associates. It is still the idea of the beautiful as a *ressort* in the State which predominates.

Other connections of art may be exhibited here. Lanson has found in the *Essai sur les causes qui peuvent affecter les Esprits* a marked tendency toward psycho-physics, toward the introduction of “nerves” into the literary psychology, which would make of Montesquieu another precursor of that modern fad.¹⁰ His partiality for physical science already indicated¹¹ would help to account for this. Certainly he is tempted to put æsthetic beauties on a material basis, as when in regard to architecture he declares its orders immutable, because “cela est pris dans la nature, et il me serait facile d’expliquer la raison physique de ceci.”¹² Art is relative to our

¹ II, 288.

² IV, 288.

³ III, 280.

⁴ III, 168. But he notes a contradiction of Plato, who desired to banish the poets, while admitting their moral effect—*P. and F.*, II, 20.

⁵ III, 160, 162—*i. e.*, still among the Greeks.

⁶ Why?

⁷ III, 163.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 28.

⁹ Cf. *inf.*, p. 87.

¹⁰ Cf. *sup.*, p. 10.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 77.

present state and to the conditions of our physical being ; it is dependent on the ‘Machine.’¹ Could we change, it would change with us :

“Si nous avions été faits autrement, nous aurions senti² autrement ; un organe de plus ou de moins dans notre machine nous aurait fait une autre éloquence, une autre poésie”

The thought is developed similarly for music and for architecture.³ Hence art is subjective and not absolute.

Its relations with his great theory of climate are not fully developed. It is the reproach made by Scherer⁴ and Saintsbury⁵ from the standpoints respectively of history and criticism. Still there is more material than one would think at first glance. He gives the general outline and leaves us to read in the special inferences.

For example, imagination seems characteristic of warm countries.⁶ The Germans lacked it.⁷ Together with taste, vivacity and *sensibilité* ;⁸ it is derivative from a greater capacity for sensation. In warm climates the susceptibility to amusements is greatest.⁹ Witness the differing effects of music on the English and on the Italians.¹⁰ So for the passions. The pleasures of society are best experienced in the temperate zones.¹¹ And hence we derive taste.

“Le climat qui fait qu’une nation aime à se communiquer, fait aussi qu’elle aime à changer ; et ce qui fait qu’une nation aime à changer, fait aussi qu’elle se forme le goût.”¹²

Again, in warm countries, there is the love of *goûts raffinés*, such as casuistry.¹³ If the climate is too torrid, the inhabitants are addicted to indolence, gentleness, conservatism and speculation.¹⁴ If it is very cold, we find endurance, courage and liberty,¹⁵ or activity and obstinacy as in England.¹⁶ We may readily draw our

¹A favorite word with him.

²The *Encyclopédie* reading, which seems preferable to “verrions.”

³vii, 117–118. ⁴*Et. sur la litt. cont.* ix, 246.

⁵*Hist. of Crit.*, ii, 514. Cf. Brunetière, *Ev. de la Crit.*, 144–5.

⁶i, 425 ; iv, 148, 151. ⁷iv, 170. ⁸iv, 148.

⁹v, 181. ¹⁰iv, 149. ¹¹iv, 226. ¹²iv, 312.

¹³P. & F., ii, 31. ¹⁴iv, 172–3, 150, 153–4. ¹⁵iv, 146, 238–9.

¹⁶iv, 168.

own conclusions : the arts will flourish best in warm though not torrid countries. It must be allowed that this hypothesis seems historically justifiable.

In connection with nature the function of art is discovery and presentation—but also selection and even betterment. For landscape-gardening :

“l'art vient à notre secours, et nous découvre la nature qui se cache elle-même. Nous aimons l'art et nous l'aimons mieux que la nature, c'est-à-dire la nature dérobée à nos yeux.”¹ At Paphos, “l'art n'y paraît que pour faire goûter avec plus d'admiration les beautés de la nature.”² Again, “la peinture ne prend la nature que là où elle est belle”³ and “l'on corrige par l'art,⁴ et les défauts de la nature, et les défauts de l'art même.”⁴

With reference to the several *genres*, he reasserts, in a single passage, this principle, that the artistic representation of objects may give more pleasure than their reality.⁵ There is thus no place in art for exact realistic delineation. Beauty, rather than truth, is the goal. This corresponds with his scientific judgment that observation is a poor thing by the side of constructive reasoning ; and he is but “un vil artiste, qui a vu une fois et n'a peut-être jamais pensé.”⁶

The value of this beauty, which art and nature alike seek, is still only in pleasure-giving capacity.⁷ Nature has more of variety⁸ and less of striking contrast.⁹ Hence our feet must not stray too far from her paths. We hear the old classic cry, “imitez la nature,”¹⁰ by which saying Raphael is praised, and works of the imagination (particularly histories¹¹) criticised,¹² when they are more responsible to the claims of truth. Yet what

¹ VII, 121.

² VII, 460.

³ Here, it is true, art mechanical.

⁴ IV, 409.

⁵ *P. & F.*, I, 290—“Les plaisirs de la lecture, lorsque l'âme s'identifie dans les objets, avec les objets (*sic*) auxquels elle s'intéresse. Il y a tel amour dont la peinture a fait plus de plaisir à ceux qui l'ont lu qu'à ceux qui l'ont ressenti. Il y a peu de jardins si agréables qu'ils aient fait plus de plaisir à ceux qui s'y promènent, qu'on (n')en a trouvé dans les jardins d'Alcide . . .”

As to feminine beauty, the passions once passed, there is more delight to be gained from a fine portrait than from the sight of the original.—In the consecrated phrase, we may give this for what it is worth.

⁶ VII, 53.

⁷ VII, 123.

⁸ VII, 121, 126.

⁹ VII, 127.

¹⁰ VII, 136.

¹¹ VII, 177.

¹² VII, 174.

persists is this belief in selection. In gardens again, we must combat nature as bringing confusion;¹ it is made a matter of reproach to coarser people that "leur âme ne sait ni composer ni décomposer; ils ne joignent ni n'ôtent rien à ce que la nature donne."² What holds for love will hold for art.

A word should be said as to Montesquieu's own appreciation of nature as equivalent to the sensible out-door world. His biography and his works³ are not lacking in allusions to the pleasures of a country life. His avocation as a natural philosopher and observer is known.⁴ His pursuits at La Brède,⁵ the care of his grounds⁶ and vineyard,⁷ the pride in his surroundings, would seem to point to the same love for nature's manifestations. He enumerates, among simple pleasures, the view of nature, productive of "douces sensations."⁸ Vian⁹ tells the story of his intention to put "O fortunatos nimium, etc.", as a motto above his gate. At another time he exclaims—"O rus quando te aspiciam!"¹⁰ There is the testimony of visitors as to his activity in country rambles.¹¹ But as Petit de Julleville has said, this interest had rather a practical basis—

"Il aimait sincèrement la vie champêtre, et il la mena le plus longtemps qu'il put; il l'aimait, non comme un poète ou comme un artiste; mais en bon propriétaire foncier, en vrai seigneur de village."¹² For the rest, his natural descriptions¹³ hardly attest the vivifying impulse which makes the most, artistically and

¹ VII, 130.

² VII, 133.

³ VII, 132-3; Vian, *Histoire*, p. 300.

⁴ *Observations sur l'histoire naturelle*, cf. *sup.*, p. 10.

⁵ "Tant la nature s'y trouve dans sa robe de chambre et au lever de son lit (VII, 402). On which Thomas comments (*Vieilles lunes d'un avocat*, p. 123)—"Pas tant dans sa robe de chambre qu'il vous plait de le dire, monsieur le Président. Cette nature-là a bien plutôt l'air d'un paysage de Télémaque,"—and Hémon notes (*Cours de litt.*, I, 26), that here, as elsewhere, a natural sentiment "revêt une forme cherchée."

⁶ VII, 271; cf. *inf.*, p. 79.

⁷ See *Lettres, passim*.

⁸ VII, 181.

⁹ *Histoire*, p. 299.

¹⁰ VII, 429.

¹¹ Vian, p. 300; see also Sayous, *XVIII^e siècle à l'étranger*, I, 211.

¹² *Hist. litt.*, VI, 177. Hémon (*loc. cit.*) agrees with this.

¹³ *T. G.*, V. à P., etc. Little can be expected along this line before the advent of Rousseau and the English poetic influence.

spiritually, of natural phenomena. With these provisions and limitations, his views, as above sketched, of the artistic conception of nature show what is really an admirable breadth and insight. Other remarks, associated with this subject, will be found under the treatment of landscape-gardening.¹

Art possesses not only relations, but interrelations. It is always interesting and fruitful to observe not only how any aesthete conceives of its gradations, but how he values the comparative method and how he applies it.

The arts, as industries, in the widest sense, “se tiennent presque tous.”² They are furthermore dependent upon social intercourse,³ a solitary individual being unable to practice his art.⁴ Their interdependence promotes the circulation of riches and the “progression de revenus.”⁵

In the technical sense also, their kinship is close:—

“Souvent un goût particulier est une preuve d'un goût général : les Muses sont coeurs, se touchent l'une et l'autre, et vivent en compagnie.”⁶

This kinship he is ready to acknowledge and illustrate, in practice, by somewhat frequent comparisons. But theoretically he contemns them, as void of proof—“les comparaisons . . . ne sont bonnes que dans l'art oratoire et la poésie et ne servent qu'à dire la même chose et plus mal.”⁷ It is true that this does not apply specifically to the critical method, but the extension is easy. Still recommending an apartness, the thing *per se*,⁸ he argues well that while the Muses may be sisters, they will ruin themselves by imitation.⁹

To glance at his application, it will be found that he nevertheless employs the method, in a superficial way indeed, for the contrasting of individuals.

Within the same *genre*, he compares several times, for instance,

¹ See *inf.*, p. 78.

² *P. & F.*, II, 196—“une aiguille est le résultat de bien des arts.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 196. ⁴ Still as meaning *industrie*. ⁵ I, 337.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 34.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 304.

⁸ See on Individualism, *inf.*, p. 52.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 17—“Les orateurs se sont perdus en imitant les poètes, comme les sculpteurs se sont perdus en copiant les peintres.”

Corneille and Racine;¹ deriving as his best conclusion that the respective merit of their plays, so far as that would imply erecting a scale of values, is not to be decided.² He may compare for qualities, as where he contrasts Rabelais' naive against Voiture's fine and fatiguing badinage;³ or where he allows gaiety to some authors,⁴ *plaisanterie*⁵ to others, and the combination only to Molière and the *Lettres Provinciales*. Or he may compare the different exponents of a literary style, as Balzac, Voiture and Fontenelle for letter-writing.⁶

In different *genres*, there is hardly more than a cataloguing of names, where authors and musicians or painters and authors are paired off, for qualities which may have impressed the writer, but which as a rule, are neither mentioned nor 'reasoned.' We learn that "Rameau est Corneille; et Sulli, Racine."⁷ Why?

In the striking passage on an author's periods,⁸ he says that a writer's 'art'—subsequent and inferior to his genius—corresponds to a painter's 'manner.' The perfect drawing of Dominichino, Guido Reni or Carraccio reminds him of the perfect versification of Rousseau (*du ruisseau*).⁹ But the most significant example in this cataloguing class is a long list of comparisons between painters and authors—significant less for what it includes than for what it leaves out.¹⁰ This list, which will be discussed later under Authors, mentions merely names, the basis for the comparison being sometimes fairly clear, though more often doubtful. Furthermore, he seems to have hesitated himself,¹¹ as to whether La Fontaine and Marot were more like Correggio or Titian respectively; as to whether Boileau would best make a running mate for Dominichino or the Carracci; and he was hard put to it

¹ Cf. *inf.*, p. 139.

² *P. & F.*, I, 50—"celle qu'on voit représenter est toujours la meilleure."

³ *P. & F.*, II, 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*—To Montaigne, Rabelais, Scarron, and to the *Lettres persanes*, which are also *riantes*.

⁵ *Ibid.*—To Voiture and Fontenelle.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 49.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 69.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 17. See *inf.*, p. 81.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 72.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 49. See *inf.*, p. 131.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, *Notes*, p. 539.

with regard to Chapelain and Dürer. In sum, such comparisons are not very valuable for themselves. We need to guess at his temperamental basis. They chiefly serve to show that he was not a master of the method, which he has slighted.

So much for his statement of the nature and relations of Art in general. We may now pass to its distinctive characteristics.

CHAPTER VI.

ART—ITS QUALITIES AND PROPERTIES.

Under this head will be treated a collection of abstract notions which Montesquieu, in the *Goût*,¹ considers more or less categorically as springs or elements of artistic valuation. Some of them are objective and hence might be classed under taste itself; but it seems better to keep his grouping intact. Such ideas are; beauty, sentiment, morality; order, symmetry, simplicity, variety; curiosity, surprise, the odd, contrasts, difficulty; association, sublimity—and the *je ne sais quoi*.

The first three properties, all or singular, are nowadays considered the root of the matter. Montesquieu gives weight to beauty, which from the standpoint of pleasure would be the more prominent, but as to the others, influenced by his character or predilections, he is not so sure.

In the first place, like art itself, such qualities are not absolute.² It is the fault of the ancient philosophers—Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—to have confused the positive with the relative.—

“Les termes de beau, de bon, de noble, de grand, de parfait, sont des attributs des objets, lesquels sont relatifs aux êtres qui les considèrent.”³

This is hardly modified by his subsequent statement that,

“Quand on dit qu'il n'y a point de qualités absolues, cela ne veut pas dire qu'il n'y en a point réellement, mais que notre esprit ne peut pas les déterminer.”⁴

We have seen that beauty's sole end is pleasure, and that it is not primarily concerned with utility.⁵ But Ste-Beuve declares:

¹ Saintsbury, *Hist. of Crit.*, p. 514—“Montesquieu is entirely occupied in tracing or imagining abstract reasons for the attractiveness of abstract things.”

² VII, 159–160, cf., pp. 115–116 and *sup.*, p. 10. Also Usbek, (1, 93), thinks with reference to pork-eating—“Il me semble que les choses ne sont en elles-mêmes ni pures, ni impures”—but only relatively to *our* natural repugnance.

³ VII, 160.

⁴ VII, 162.

⁵ *Sup.*, p. 22.

“J’ai parlé tout à l’heure de l’utile: Montesquieu y joignait une idée du beau. Il avait un divin exemplaire en lui: il a élevé un temple, la foule y est couru. Mais n’y a-t-il pas introduit quelques idoles?”¹ To reconcile this is difficult. May we not suppose provisionally that an economist’s theory of the beautiful would lack efficiency and permanency when placed in rivalry with his practical bent? Still he values the quality. It comes before the good and the grand in his initial enumeration,² it was the first-born of the gods;³ in monarchies, it is closely associated with *honneur*, and actions rank there as beautiful rather than as good.⁴ We are informed (in his verse) that a negligent unconscious beauty is best of all.⁵ If its dominion is fragile,⁶ it has yet been known to carry it over mere pleasure.⁷ These last indications are slight, but for all that, his doctrine, as doctrine, is definite. It becomes the man of taste which he esteemed himself.

Beauty in itself is neither the great nor the difficult,—things which were indifferently styled *beautiful*, before the advent of the arts.⁸ He adopts as excellent Buffier’s definition of beauty as “l’assemblage de ce qu’il y a de plus commun.” For the fine things are those of which there is the greatest number alike—the hazards of variation tending to difformity, and this sort of scattering vote being unable to compete with the type of union and regularity. This principle may explain “toutes les beautés de goûts, même dans les ouvrages d’esprit. Mais il faudra penser là-dessus.” There is little room for individualism in this.⁹

As to feeling the small part which it played in Montesquieu’s life and character¹⁰ would not lead us to seek much expression or discussion of it in his suggestions on taste.

Indeed all that we learn in the two divisions¹¹ devoted to this

¹ *C. de L.*, VII, 61.

² VII, 115—“ces différents plaisirs de notre âme qui forment les objets du goût, comme le beau, le bon, l’agréable, etc.”

³ II, 391.

⁴ III, 143.

⁵ VII, 197, 203.

⁶ IV, 341.

⁷ VH, 161—“J’ai entendu la première représentation d’*Ines de Castro*, de M. de La Motte. J’ai bien vu qu’elle n’a réussi qu’à force d’être belle, et qu’elle a plu aux spectateurs malgré eux.”

⁸ *P. & F.*, I, 313.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 65–6, cf. *inf.*, p. 53.

¹⁰ Cf. *sup.*, p. 9,

¹¹ VII, 130–132.

subject is that the passions in the singing of *virtuosi* are “trop suspectes de fausseté,” and that a sensation or a sentiment (he seems to have confounded the two) is manifold and full of accessory ideas. So, from force of association, he is more touched by the second representation of a play than by the first.¹ We are justified in feeling pity for certain situations,² but, on physiological grounds, there is fatigue in unvarying sensations.³ It is difficult to see how he can speak of the historical labors of Rollin as “le coeur qui parle au coeur.”⁴ The true passion of tragedy is *terror*, and it is hard to judge of Crébillon because of disturbing emotions.⁵ Still the passions are not ridiculous in themselves, and it is the fault of comedy to use them for laughter.⁶

Morality plays the smallest part of all. So far as the moral is the public good, Montesquieu would recommend goodness. But otherwise he is a lenient critic of men and manners, with considerable taste for things not particularly virtuous. We do not see from his utterances that morality and art have any connection. There are some conventional expressions of admiration, as when the good Rollin comes in for another neat phrase—“on sent une secrète satisfaction d'entendre parler la vertu : c'est l'abeille de la France.”⁷ The *vertu* of the Romans was much more to his taste. Marcus Aurelius is worthy of all praise.⁸ But ‘good’ is another relative term,⁹ and in general this is his apology.—

“C'est en vain qu'une morale austère veut effacer les traits que le plus grand des ouvriers a gravés dans nos âmes : c'est à la morale qui veut travailler sur le coeur de l'homme à régler ces sentiments, et non pas à les détruire. Nos auteurs moraux sont presque tous outrés : ils parlent à l'entendement, et non pas à cette âme.”⁹

One is tempted, for the sentiment part, to cry *de te fabula*.

Among those qualities which remain, Vian¹⁰ is probably right in thinking that variety comes nearest being the cardinal principle. It is at any rate a connecting link and a *point de repère* for most of them. It is a necessary element in composition.¹¹ Without it

¹ VII, 161—but cf. p. 147.

² VII, 139, 145.

³ VII, 127.

⁴ VII, 163.

⁵ VII, 161.

⁶ VII, 162.

⁷ VII, 160.

⁸ VII, 115, 160.

⁹ VII, 150.

¹⁰ P. 314.

¹¹ All this is from the *Goût*, VII, 123–4.

the soul languishes : for like things appear the same and give no pleasure. In art as in nature, aspects and sentiments¹ must vary.—

“C'est ainsi que les histoires nous plaisent par la variété des récits, les romans par la variété des prodiges, les pièces de théâtre par la variété des passions.”

Uniformity as equivalent to political conservatism, he has characterized in its excess as a mark of small souls.²

Long uniformity is unsupportable in a style of similarly constructed periods, in a poem of similar numbers and climaxes, in landscapes of similar situations. Yet variety must not impede vision. This is the fault of Gothic architecture, whereas, by its helpful divisions, the Greek seems uniform. A host of differences in minutiae is fatiguing and obscuring.

Variety is the best of nature³ and for books the same holds good. He is prompt to praise “cette variété qui délasse l'esprit”⁴—he finds it even in Academy eulogiums;⁵ and again he is equally prompt to censure the constant use of monotonous unrelieved antitheses.⁶ For his own part he will endeavor to avoid, as in the *Temple de Gnide*⁷ any “uniformité vicieuse”—though he has accused himself of having a mind like a mould.⁸ It is true that beauty—of women—is due to regularity of features.⁹ But regularity is not only quite limited ; in its excess it is disagreeable.¹⁰

That we must nevertheless have order and symmetry would seem at first to involve some contradiction.¹¹ He explains this by providing that the pleasure which we derived from symmetry is in the ease with which it allows us to perceive a whole. Hence a general rule :

“Partout où la symétrie est utile à l'âme, et peut aider ses fonctions, elle lui est agréable ; mais partout où elle est inutile, elle est fade, parce qu'elle ôte la variété. Or les choses que nous voyons successivement doivent avoir de la variété ; car

¹ =sensation?

² v, 412–13, cf. *inf.*, p. 52.

³ VII, 121.

⁴ VII, 81.

⁵ VII, 93.

⁶ VII, 127.—I need only mention here his own crass sins in this particular.

⁷ II, 9–10.

⁸ VII, 421—cf. *sup.*, pp. 15, 16.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 66. Whereas the grotesque is limitless.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 78.—“Il n'y a rien de si beau que le ciel ; mais il est semé d'étoiles sans ordre. Les maisons et jardins d'autour de Paris n'ont que le défaut de se ressembler trop : ce sont des copies continues de Le Nôtre.”

¹¹ VII, 125–8.

notre âme n'a aucune difficulté à les voir. Celles au contraire que nous apercevons d'un coup d'œil doivent avoir de la symétrie."

This he applies particularly to architecture. The object should be simple and unique, and symmetry's great attraction is to make a *tout ensemble*.¹ Nature leaves no imperfect part; a *pondération* or balancing is accordingly needed in art.

Order links to past and future and thereby our soul is pleased.² It is troubled by confusion, when our imagined *suite* disagrees with the artist's. "L'âme ne retient rien, ne prévoit rien, elle est humiliée par la confusion de ses idées, par l'inanité qui lui reste; elle est vainement fatiguée, et ne peut goûter aucun plaisir."³ There should be order in confusion itself, as in battlepieces.² Order is the rule of the universe, though it be not the harmony of Heraclitus.³ It is the basis of science, not to be dispensed with in art.⁴ It is required in art's forms, as in gardens;⁵ in literature, it is the first thing learned in the study;⁶ as proportion it appears in things like the adjustment of parts in St. Peter's,⁷ and even in the girdle appropriate to Venus.⁸ Such symmetry must not be pushed into the mechanical. Painters and sculptors violate their standards of bodily proportions, because of varying attitudes.⁹ Michelangelo played with his principles. Architecture is not exact. But, as a rule, great wholes must have great parts.¹⁰ This is in nature.

The idea of contrasts¹¹ is associated with that of variety on the one hand and with that of symmetry on the other. In painting and in sculpture, especially in the latter because it is colder, there must be symmetry in the parts but contrast in the attitudes.¹² We are not oriental idols. Contrast itself may degenerate into the "vicious uniformity," as has been seen for antitheses; and painters "sans ménagement" allow one to guess exact correspondances in their figures. The diverse again becomes the similar. Moreover:

¹ VII, 125-8.

² VII, 122.

³ VII, 13.

⁴ Cf. *inf.*, p. 60.

⁵ VII, 130.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 10.

⁷ VII, 137.

⁸ VII, 136.

⁹ VII, 142-3.

¹⁰ VII, 124.

¹¹ VII, 126-7.

¹² Also *P. & F.*, II, 70—If symmetry in attitudes is "insupportable" so is the contrast "trop contraste," which in the last analysis is also symmetry.

" La nature ne montre pas l'affectation d'un contraste continual ; sans compter qu'elle ne met pas tous les corps en mouvement, et dans un mouvement forcé. Elle est plus variée que cela ; elle met les uns en repos, et elle donne aux autres différentes sortes de mouvement."

Contrasts have their ludicrous side, as in comedy, where there is dissonance between a character and a situation.¹ Our laughter frequently redoubles, because of the contrast between our dignity and the comic impulse.² " Tous les contrastes nous frappent, parce que les choses en opposition se relèvent tous les deux."³ This, however, is not of universal application, for :

" Deux beautés communes se défont ; deux grandes beautés se font valoir."⁴

These are the true beauties of opposition, where the inevitable Florus⁵ comes in to support a distinction between antitheses in ideas and mere antitheses of expression, favorable to the former.⁶ But "les contrastes sont cause des défauts aussi bien que des beautés. Lorsque nous voyons qu'ils sont sans raison, qu'ils relèvent ou éclairent un autre défaut, ils sont les grands instruments de la laideur," and may thus not only provoke laughter, but also pity and even aversion.⁷ An opposition which is contrary to good sense, or which is too *recherché*, no longer pleases and is hence a distinct defect. In large relations, as in particulars, the principle obtains. He thinks that all the *agrément* of his own *Lettres persanes* consisted "dans le contraste éternel entre les choses réelles et la manière singulière, naïve ou bizarre, dont elles étaient aperçues."⁸—We shall see that the connection between contrast and surprise is intimate.⁹

Curiosity, it has been seen, is a noteworthy trait of Montesquieu's character and mind.¹⁰ He lauds it as a sign of the times.¹¹ A thinking, perceiving soul should have it.¹² For, in the chain of things, "on ne peut aimer à voir une chose sans désirer

¹ VII, 145.

² VII, 139.

³ VII, 138.

⁴ VII, 172—Applied especially to physical beauty.

⁵ Cf. *inf.*, p. 136.

⁶ Cf. *inf.*, p. 159.

⁷ VII, 140.

⁸ I, 49.

⁹ Cf. *inf.*, p. 41.

¹⁰ Cf. *sup.*, p. 10.

¹¹ "... une certaine curiosité que tous les hommes ont, et qui n'a jamais été si raisonnable que dans ce siècle-ci . . ." Hence comes knowledge.—VII, 78.

¹² VII, 120.

d'en voir une autre." Accordingly, the more things we see, the better pleased we are, and a wide range over nature gives us greatest enjoyment. In the intellectual sphere, we have the famous aphorism.¹

"Ce qui fait ordinairement une grande pensée, c'est lorsqu'on dit une chose qui en fait voir un grand nombre d'autres."²

In gaming, or at the theatre, the suspension of interest is what gives pleasure.³ Finally, for literature in particular, curiosity is the "principe du plaisir."⁴

From curiosity derives the search after novelty,⁵ which in turn, together with the unexpected and the marvelous, produces surprise.⁶ He dwells much upon this *ressort*. Its action is spectacular and prompt. Not only does it obtain for plays and games, but even "les ouvrages d'esprit ne sont ordinairement lus que parce qu'ils nous ménagent des surprises agréables."⁷ Accessory ideas enter in here,⁸ and startling climaxes provoke his admiration.

The movement is towards this climax in the progression of surprise.⁹ The bizarre seen all at once will amaze,¹⁰ but the effect does not increase. Surprise is the essence of epigrams;¹¹ it is part of variety, and an effect of contrasts.¹² An illustration is given from natural scenery. In surprise and contrast alike the emotion arises partly from the difference between the actual and what ought to be.¹³

Another relative of curiosity is what briefly we may call mystery and what Montesquieu calls the *je ne sais quoi*¹⁴—described as "un charme invisible, une grâce naturelle, qu'on n'a pu définir." This likewise springs from surprise, if we had expected to discover less. He applies it particularly to women,

¹ Assuredly characteristic of the man and his method.

² VII, 121.

³ VII, 146-7, also VII, 171—"l'attente est une chaîne qui lie tous nos plaisirs."

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 122.

⁵ VII, 120.

⁶ VII, 128.

⁷ VII, 129.

⁸ Cf. *inf.*, pp. 43, 81.

⁹ VII, 136-7.

¹⁰ VII, 136, cf. *inf.*, p. 53.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 284—"une belle réponse parce qu'elle est contradictoire à celle que l'on attend."

¹² VII, 138.

¹³ VII, 119, 139, 145.

¹⁴ VII, 133-5.

with little artistic reference.¹ “Nous n’aimons presque que ce que nous ne connaissons pas;”² and what is hidden usually excites us most.³ In all the arts and particularly in poetry, there are “certaines félicités que l’on ne rattrape point.”⁴ In literature, there is again the glamour of language. A certain work may please more in Latin than in French :—

“C’est que le français représente aux Français les choses comme elles sont : il lui donne une idée juste, qui est si claire qu’il n’en peut pas ajouter des accessoires. Dans le latin, que nous n’entendons pas parfaitement, l’imagination ajoute à la véritable idée une idée accessoire qui est toujours plus agréable.”⁵

So he urges for style the principle of suggestiveness, of leaving something to the reader.⁶ Perhaps we may associate with it that other idea of *ars celare artem*, which he applauds :⁷—

“Mais⁸ si vous ne voulez point adoucir la rigueur de mes travaux, cachez le travail même ; faites qu’on soit instruit, et que je n’enseigne pas ; que je réfléchisse et que je paraisse sentir ; et lorsque j’annoncerai des choses nouvelles, faites qu’on croie que je ne savais rien, et que vous m’avez tout dit.”

Other more independent qualities are sublimity, *naïveté* and association. Of these three the greatest is simplicity ; “car la majesté demande une certaine gravité, c'est-à-dire une gêne opposée à l'ingénuité des grâces.”⁹ And though we admire the majesty of Paolo Veronese, we are touched by the simplicity of Raphael.¹⁰ Corneille is pompous where Racine is natural.¹¹ Yet, for the “gens qui sont bien élevés,” sublimity and nobility persist as ideas ; a thing seems noble when accessories enhance it ; so in comparison one should proceed from the less to the greater.¹² Unfortunately, among us moderns, the feeling for the sublime is largely ruined by the philosophy of reason, which has diminished the taste for poetry by reducing all to general ideas and pure understanding.¹³ Among the people, the *bas* is the sublime,¹⁴ and this passage would give us the whole situation :

¹ VII, 133–5.

² VII, 117.

³ VII, 120.

⁴ P. & F., II, 17.

⁵ P. & F., II, 67.

⁶ Cf. *inf.*, p. 130.

⁷ VII, 85, 161.

⁸ “Invocation aux Muses,” IV, 360.

⁹ VII, 136, cf. *sup.* p. 36.

¹⁰ VII, 134.

¹¹ VII, 140.

¹² VII, 141—Michelangelo is the great exponent of nobility and Giulio Romano is also instanced.

¹³ P. & F., I, 222.

¹⁴ VII, 140.

"Le style enflé et emphatique est si bien le plus aisé que, si vous voyez une nation sortir de la barbarie, vous verrez que son style donnera d'abord dans le sublime, et ensuite descendra au naïf. La difficulté du naïf est que le bas le côtoie;¹ mais il y a une différence immense du sublime au naïf, et du sublime au galimatias."²

Because the naïve is between the low and the noble, it is the most difficult of styles, though one of the most pleasing,³ and the most replete with grace.⁴ Education, which produces *gène*, and affectation spoil this grace, this naturalness in our manners and in our *esprit*.⁴ "Ainsi les grâces ne s'acquièrent point: pour en avoir, il faut être naïf. Mais comment peut-on travailler à être naïf?"⁴ It is what we shall have to ask ourselves when it comes to a question of his own style.⁵

He is quite fond of the notion of accessory or associated ideas. There is a bit of impressionism in this.⁶—"Nous sommes tous pleins d'idées accessoires."⁷ The more we have, the more delicate is our taste.⁸ So each sentiment is composed of many others;⁹ and the surprise may be in the association.¹⁰ Thereby we gain more pleasure.¹¹ Such are the accessory ideas¹² of the persons joined to the performance, of the difficulty of the work, of our previous recollections,¹³ etc. As to the artists themselves, we are displeased with the idea of *virtuosi*,¹⁴ however well they sing; an actress will please us off the stage, because we still think of her as the princess or what not.¹⁵ He finds impressiveness or at least cause for admiration in a *tour de force*.—A thing is hard to do, therefore excellent.¹⁶ Expense may even be a consideration.¹⁷—We can eliminate other inconsiderable details, and pass to a discussion of *goût* itself as interpreted in this *Essai*.

¹ Repeated VII, 140. ² VII, 176-7. ³ VII, 140. ⁴ VII, 141.

⁵ "Pour s'élever au rang des plus grands, il lui a manqué seulement un peu plus de naturel et de simplicité." Petit de Julleville, VI, 201. Cf. *inf.*, p. 186.

⁶ Cf. *inf.*, p. 53. ⁷ VII, 132, cf. *sup.*, p. 41.

⁸ VII, 133. ⁹ VII, 129, 131. ¹⁰ VII, 129. ¹¹ Cf. *sup.*, p. 22.

¹² VII, 129, 131. ¹³ VII, 131-2, vs. 147. ¹⁴ VII, 131. ¹⁵ VII, 132.

¹⁶ VII, 130-1, 140. Yet elsewhere (*P. & F.*, I, 313) it was people without taste who so judged.

¹⁷ VII, 130—He was rather parsimonious.

CHAPTER VII.

ART—CRITERION—TASTE.

Such qualities as have been dealt with are the objects of Taste.¹ Taste is defined as nothing else than “l'avantage de découvrir avec finesse et avec promptitude la mesure du plaisir que chaque chose doit donner aux hommes.” It is in rendering reasoning for our sentiments that our taste is formed.² There are two varieties corresponding to the two varieties of pleasure, the natural and the acquired:³

“Le goût naturel n'est pas une connaissance de théorie, c'est une application prompte et exquise des règles même que l'on ne connaît pas.”⁴

Neither precepts, nor analysis of our pleasures, nor any philosophy can form this innate taste. A taste formed is a taste acquired.⁵ Yet it is true that the two kinds mutually affect and alter each other.

Taste is a species under the genus *esprit*.⁵ Its specific mark is delicacy.⁶ It is also a matter of feeling rather than of thought—though Montesquieu would connect the two⁷—and we have thence, from another point of view, its most general definition as “ce qui nous attache à une chose par le sentiment.”⁸

As a product of this sentiment, of this delicacy, it is the peculiar property of a certain class of people. There is little difficulty in divining what class of people is meant. Among the nations, he commends the development of taste with the Greeks;⁸ with the English he has remarked “plus d'esprit que de goût,”⁹ even their

¹ VII, 115.

² VII, 116, cf. *inf.*, p. 50, also VII, 131—“Souvent notre âme se compose elle-même des raisons de plaisir.”

³ VII, 117.

⁴ VII, 118.

⁵ VII, 119.

⁶ VII, 120, 133.

⁷ This is significant, as illustrating once more the struggle between heart and head. Cf. *sup.*, pp. 9, 36.

⁸ IV, 414.

⁹ IV, 354.

poets showing rather crude creation than delicate subtleties.¹ It is France, he proudly declares, France which rivals the ancients in this source of wealth,² this mark of excellence.³ And at home, what caste will appropriate its blessings? The people, "cette sorte de gens que l'on a abandonnés dans tous les âges,"⁴ contrast unfavorably here with the cultured classes.⁵ He gives his ideal in the chapter on education⁶ in monarchies :

"On trouve à la cour⁷ une délicatesse de goût en toutes choses, qui vient d'un usage continual des superfluités d'une grande fortune, de la variété, et surtout de la lassitude des plaisirs, de la multiplicité, de la confusion même des fantaisies, qui, lorsqu'elles sont agréables, y sont toujours reçues.—C'est sur toutes ces choses que l'éducation se porte pour faire ce qu'on appelle l'honnête homme, qui a toutes les qualités et toutes les vertus que l'on demande dans ce gouvernement."⁸

Taste is, again, a "plaisir délicat des gens du monde;"⁹ and, "ceux qui jugent avec goût des ouvrages d'esprit ont et se font une infinité de sensations que les autres hommes n'ont pas."¹⁰ He insists upon the multiplicity and the increasing diminutiveness¹¹ of these sensations, and remarks, after Italy has made him "open his eyes on the arts," that small tastes supplant large ones,¹² and "il ne faut pas examiner si on y perd ou si on y gagne."¹³

The monopolizing of taste may be carried even further; the *Temple de Gnide*¹⁴ is for "têtes bien frisées et bien poudrées;"¹⁵ women, connected with all *agréments*,¹⁶ form taste above all.¹⁷ How could he fail to recognize this reigning influence of his time?¹⁸

¹ IV, 356.

² Note the economist.

³ IV, 308.

⁴ III, 144.

⁵ VII, 140—Not, indeed, directly so stated—he says only "le bas est le sublime du peuple."

⁶ *Scil.*, "du monde."

⁷ He did not, however, exemplify or commend the courtier's life as such.

⁸ III, 144–45.

⁹ VII, 120.

¹⁰ VII, 133.

¹¹ IV, 148; VII, 131, etc.—Connected with accessory ideas. There is some Marotism in this. Cf. VII, 85.

¹² Cf. *sup.*, p. 27, n. 5.

¹³ VII, 227.

¹⁴ Dedicated to a princess of the blood.

¹⁵ II, 11.

¹⁶ IV, 210.

¹⁷ After remarking that taste springs from national inconstancy (quoted *sup.*, p. —) he states further that "La société des femmes gâte les moeurs et forme le goût." (IV, 312) Sorel objects that the contrary was true in M's case. Cf. *inf.*, pp.—

¹⁸ Shown in all his lighter works. Cf. II, 382.

All this seems quite clear and quite positive doctrine. It is coherent and logical. It is what we would expect from the monarchist of the *Esprit des Lois*, from the fine theorist of the *Goût*, from the *chevalier des dames* of the *Temple de Gnide*—whence the quotations are largely derived. But it is sufficiently evident by now that Montesquieu had still another side to his character. It is from the flotsam and jetsam of the *Pensées et Fragments*—where I think may often be found much of his rarer and more intimate thought—that a quite different conception emerges.

Here, he is more far-sighted in penetration and takes many more reserves. In the first place, the things of taste are very obscure.¹ Recurring to his favorite principle of relativity,² he speaks boldly for tolerance, declaring that no taste is always infallible,³ that it varies from China to France, according to the principle of P. Buffier, and that this same principle of common regularity,⁴ “est excellent peut-être pour expliquer toutes les beautés de goût.”¹

Generally, for aesthetics, it may be granted that now we are better informed, “depuis qu'on a connu si bien les sources de l'agréable et du beau,”⁵ than when, the arts being unknown :

“Les hommes sans goût appelaient *beau* tout ce qui était grand, tout ce qui était difficile,⁶ tout ce qui avait été fait par un grand nombre de bras.”⁷

When it comes to discriminating between the persons who ultimately know, his standpoint appears to have changed radically. Taste may still be the property of Paris.⁸ But the *gens de goût* are not only to be carefully distinguished from the *gens riches* ;⁹ they may not wholly, we infer, be identified with the *honnêtes gens*. For Montesquieu finally admits a possible democratization of taste, in allowing that the *people* is *honnête dans ses goûts*,¹⁰ that in the long run it is the taste or judgment of the public which decides.¹¹

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 66. ² Cf. *sup.*, pp. 28–9. ³ *P. & F.*, II, 27. ⁴ Cf. *sup.*, p. 36.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 51.—It is true that his belief varies as to how well we know them.

⁶ Cf. *sup.*, p. 43. ⁷ *P. & F.*, I, 313.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 180.—“A Paris, on passe sa vie avec des goûts. Dans les pays étrangers, il faut des passions, disait M. Lomillini.”

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 78. ¹⁰ VII, 174.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 26.—“Ses jugements scellés par le temps sont presque toujours bons.”

Again :

"A la fin, le public rend justice. En voici la raison : le suffrage des gens sages est constant ; mais ceux (*sic*) des fous sont divers, et varient sans cesse, et se détruisent les uns les autres."¹

Whatever there may be of apparent contradiction in these diverse statements can perhaps be eliminated by freshly considering his own definition and division of taste. We have seen that on the one hand it is a matter of sentiment and delicacy, on the other a matter of judgment and criticism ; that it may be innate or acquired.² May we not infer then that, of his two opposed classes of persons, the *raffinés*, the *gens du monde* appropriate the blessings of the first kind, while the larger public comes with the less immediate and surer judgment of the second ? It seems a question of sensitized perception in the first case³ —the perception that was lacking in the geometer of the *Lettres persanes*,⁴ who was ridiculed as seeing only a building of certain dimensions, where other men viewed a superb castle. The people of innate taste perceive immediately, in the present, with vividness of impression, based consciously on no rules. The people of acquired taste judge leisurely, for the future, with fulness of reasoned knowledge. This nearly approaches our latter-day differentiation between impressionistic and scientific criticism. We would not be warranted in assuming which kind Montesquieu in the end prefers.

As for his own taste, he trusts that it is excellent.⁵ This opinion may be reserved for later consideration.⁶ In the meantime, it is fair to say that he values the quality with an honest emphasis. It is with reference solely to this standard that he frequently praises or condemns works of art, as of "bon goût" or "mauvais goût."⁷ And the excellence of critics would seem to depend primarily upon the predominance of this faculty.⁸

¹*P. & F.*, II, 28, cf. again the P. Buffier's theory, which quite probably suggested this line of reasoning.

²Cf. *sup.*, pp. 44–5.

³See the above excellent definition, p. 44.

⁴I, 397.

⁵In connection with his *penchant* for the ancients.

⁶See *inf.*, under criticism of Doctrine, p. 201.

⁷*Voyages*, I, 191, 238, etc.

⁸vii, 264.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCHOOLS—CLASSICISM VS. INDIVIDUALISM.

Since the divisions of this treatise must largely follow the material¹ and since the above subject stands well forward, both for its intrinsic importance, and for its predominance in our author's mind, it has seemed worth while to devote a chapter to his discussion.

The strife implied between the standards corresponds somewhat with that just mentioned, between a personal temperamental taste and the judgments of a cultivated mind. It corresponds still more closely with the subsequent opposition of ancients and moderns under Literature.²

Classicism finds its most usual antithesis, indeed, in Romanticism. But of that, in Montesquieu's time, there could certainly be little premonition. As to the self-assertiveness of the individual, however, one might well ask, is it assuming too much to accredit our author with some appreciation of such principles—principles of independence and inventiveness, of personality and even of iconoclasm? Could it be expected that the foremost apostle of liberty,³ the political partner of Rousseau, the father of the Girondists, would show entire conformity, entire accord with a decrepit order, in things artistic? It is true that light came latest just in this field for the time and its interpreters; still there might well be some glimmerings of emancipation, even in a *philosophe*—for the *philosophe* himself had taken a forward step in emancipation of another sort.

Liberty, in sum, would be an extensive and encyclopedic principle. Among other things, it should embrace art. But just here there are two considerations that give us pause. The first is Montesquieu's occasionally bewildering gift of moderation, his

¹ Cf. *sup.*, p. 13.

² Cf. *inf.*, p. 124.

³ Cf. *inf.*, p. 204.

hedging, his disposition to show both sides of the medal. The second is the fact, that in all his lauding of liberty, it is never the individual liberty,¹ the individual right that he recommends. Like the ancient legislators, says Janet, Montesquieu “ignore entièrement le droit de l'individu.”² And Beudant believes that “individualiste par toutes les tendances, il garde le préjugé de l'Etat providence.”³

There are still these *other* tendencies.—The best way, as usual, will be to discard these *a priori* insinuations and to seek for what he has said.

The term “classicism,” in its ambiguity, may be used in several ways. There is the simple love of the classics; and the consequent formulation of rules and principles drawn therefrom by a neo-classical school of France or of England. There is the further disposition to define the literary products of these principles as themselves “classics.” Whence derive fresh principles and fresh products, *ad infinitum* until inanition and putrescence set in—which point was attained in the eighteenth century.

The first two original kinds of classicism are those which will find most frequent illustration in Montesquieu's doctrine; as a matter first of concrete choice, and then, inductively, of abstract dogma.

For the first kind, his sincere preference for the ancients admits of little doubt.⁴

He will choose a “finished and finite” past, rather than elect a new, an unborn excellence. Classicism, where it is genuinely classic, needs no further excuse. The *Télémaque* is divine, because in it Homer seems to breathe again.⁴ The Greek bard has given us the two only kinds of epic which we yet have.⁵ He holds that:

“Sophocle, Euripide, Eschyle, ont d'abord porté le genre d'invention au point que nous n'avons rien changé depuis aux règles qu'ils nous ont laissées, ce qu'ils n'ont pu faire sans une connaissance parfaite de la nature et des passions.”⁴

Many other of our *genres* come from the ancients.⁵ He declares

¹ Cf. *inf.*, p. 122.

² Ed. *E. L.*, p. 318.

³ Beudant, *Droit Individuel*, etc., p. 126.

⁴ VII, 158.

⁵ *Voyages*, II, 374.

—and it is a significant utterance on the classic side—that, “Les Anglais sont des génies singuliers ; ils n’imiteront pas même les anciens qu’ils admirent.”¹ But as to uninspired imitations he is not so sure.²

The classicism on principle occupies much of Montesquieu’s thoughts. Duparcq³ thinks he finds in the *Goût* a broad recognition of convention as “plaisir acquis.” By this it would be a virtue in art to resemble itself.⁴ The several watch-words of the classical contest find fresh expressions.

As to Order, what has already been said of this *versus* variety⁵ may pass for here.—The great point of agreement between his intelligence and Boileau’s rules, is the divine right of *reason*. It is possible, he declares, to “faire un art de la raison même,”⁶ and no phrase comes nearer expressing his artistic ideal. Reason’s empire is natural, even tyrannical ; resistance is vain, and to her laws we must always return.⁷ By the will of the Muses, “je parle à la raison ; elle est le plus parfait, le plus noble et le plus exquis de nos sens.”⁸ Pleasure itself, we have seen, can be reasoned⁹ and should be reasonable.¹⁰ Where it is possible to please in other respects,¹¹ we should still cling to reason as much as may be. Otherwise that which primarily sins against *bon sens* can no longer please.¹² But reason, or rather its forced application, has nevertheless its limits :¹³

“Les principes de la géométrie sont très-vrais ; mais si on les appliquait à des choses de goût, on ferait déraisonner la raison même.”¹⁴

¹ VII, 169.

² VII, 160–1 ; 478.

³ *Notes*, p. 65.

⁴ The formulation of this principle is, however, not definite. It would seem allied with Spencer’s “economy of attention” and, more nearly with M’s “pleasure of recognition.” (VII, 121).

⁵ Cf. *sup.*, pp. 38–9.

⁶ III, 221.

⁷ V, 356.

⁸ IV, 360.

⁹ VII, 131.

¹⁰ VII, 143.

¹¹ VII, 143–4.

¹² VII, 140, 143. *Bons sens* is made the standard again and again. For its lack he condemns the extravagancies of *nouvellistes*, (I, 404), of grammarians and their kin (I, 419), and of poets (I, 425).

¹³ VI, 202–3. It is true that he is inveighing here against the narrowness of his theological critics—but the whole passage is worth consulting. Cf. *inf.*, pp. 53, 122.

¹⁴ Cf. *à propos*, our former geometer (I, 397.)

After this, one is somewhat surprised to hear him declare that architecture is everywhere and always the same, that to condemn French architecture is to condemn Italian and is as illogical as condemning Italian geometry, that the pleasure we take in buildings is largely mathematical.¹ Exact proportions can be disregarded only by a Michelangelo, whose excellent taste knew what ‘ought’ to be done to satisfy the eye.² But for him, “il semblait qu'il eût un art à part pour chaque ouvrage.”³

For others, in varying *genres*, Montesquieu leans towards a belief in the rigidity of standards. The Medici Venus is the model of beauty and shows the way a woman ‘ought’ to be represented :⁴

“Elle sert de règle, et ce qui est semblable dans les proportions à cette statue est bien, et ce qui s'en écarte est mal.”⁵

In the drama, the above-mentioned Greek tragedians⁶ having attained the highest possible—not “perfection” but “la totale invention,” have left us rules, which, in Aristotle’s formulation, “subsistent toujours.”⁷ “Nous ne pouvons nous en départir.”⁸ That, I think, is as heartily classic as we could desire. Comedy, however, is equally hide-bound, since—unlike life—it must necessarily have five acts.⁹

There is a whole division on “rules” in the *Goût*, where he takes some reserves :¹⁰

“Tous les ouvrages de l’art ont des règles générales, qui sont des guides q’il ne faut jamais perdre de vue.—Mais comme les lois sont toujours justes dans leur être général, mais presque toujours injustes dans l’application ; de même les règles, toujours vraies dans la théorie, peuvent devenir fausses dans l’hypothèse.”

So with regard to physical proportions in painting. Art gives rules and taste shows us where art ‘ought’ to submit and where it ought to reign. But whether or not a thing ‘ought’¹¹ to please or ‘ought’¹² to surprise, is a dominance

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 76.

² *Voyages*, II, 346.

³ VII, 143.

⁴ *Voyages*, II, 329.

⁵ *Voyages*, II, 330.

⁶ Cf. *sup.*, p. 49.

⁷ *Voyages*, II, 351.—Repeated, with some modification, *ibid.*, p. 374.

⁸ The stronger phraseology is from II, 374.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 92. Cf. *inf.*, p. 114.

¹⁰ VII, 142–3.

¹¹ VII, 116.

¹² VII, 119.

of taste, rather than of formulated rules. And the rules of taste it has been seen, may not always be patent.¹

He flatters himself, in the preface to the *Temple de Gnide* that he has, in that work, observed the ‘rules;’² but if not, he is careless of criticism in this respect.

“Quelques savants n’y ont point reconnu ce qu’ils appellent l’art. Il n’est point, disent-ils, selon les règles. Mais si l’ouvrage a plu, vous verrez que le cœur ne leur a pas dit toutes les règles.”³

But one fears that the ‘heart,’ as a source of rules, is here a pure affectation. In regard to the *Esprit des Lois* he has shown a still prouder individuality.⁴

As for this ‘nature,’ whence spring rules, we have in frequent recurrence—especially in praise of Raphael—the ancient slogan, “imitez la nature.”⁵ Yet it has been observed⁶ that art must put order in her confusion and selection in her wholesale abundance.

We find thus notions quite opposed to formalism. The idea of an “art apart for each work”⁷ seems almost a precursor of late standards of judgment.⁸ In the criticism of the Academy against the *Cid*—

“C’est dans ce cas où la morale exigeait qu’avant de penser à ce qu’elle devait au public, elle pensât à ce qu’elle devait à Corneille, et peut-être . . . au grand Corneille.”⁹ Authority itself has its limits. It reigns only in the domain of fact, and not in the realms of reasoning.¹⁰ “Ipse dixit est toujours une sottise.”¹¹

In the curious chapter on uniformity, where, as Riaux¹² says, Montesquieu combats “la manie de tout niveler,” we learn that the known perfection which strikes small souls may yield to the greatness of a genius which realizes “dans quel cas il faut l’uniformité et dans quel cas il faut des différences.”¹³

¹ VII, 118—“des règles que l’on ne connaît pas.” May I compare “Le cœur a ses raisons?”

² “. . . les règles, que les auteurs des poétiques ont prises dans la nature, s’y trouvent observées.” II, 9.

³ II, 10, 11.

⁴ VII, 386—“Mon intention a été de faire mon ouvrage et non pas le sien.”

⁵ VII, 136; *Voyages*, I, 229, 231, 240. ⁶ See *sup.*, p. 30.

⁷ See *sup.*, p. 29. ⁸ Associated with his ideas of relativity.

⁹ P. & F., II, 50. ¹⁰ P. & F., II, 22. ¹¹ P. & F., II, 490.

¹² *Notice*, p. 16, cf. *sup.*, p. 38.

¹³ V, 412.

For his own judgments, he is the captain of his artistic soul ; and individuality becomes impressionism—

“ Il y a des coeurs qui sont faits pour certains genres de dramatique ; le mien en particulier est fait pour celui de Crébillon . . . je ne prétends pas donner mon opinion pour les autres. Quand un sultan est dans son sérapé, va-t-il choisir la plus belle ? Non, il regarde, et il dit ; Je l'aime ; il la prend . . . ”¹

Talent is god-given and unconscious ;² genius, be it a “ rudesse originale d'invention,”³ is above the dominion of rules, and should be freed from the carping of critics.—

“ On vient nous mettre un béguin sur la tête, pour nous dire à chaque mot : ‘ Prenez garde de tomber ; vous voulez parler comme nous, je veux que vous parliez comme moi.’ Va-t-on prendre l'essor ? ils vous arrêtent par la manche. A-t-on de la force et de la vie ? on vous l'ôte à coups d'épingle. Vous élévez—vous un peu ? voilà des gens qui prennent leur pied, ou leur toise, lèvent la tête, et vous crient de descendre pour vous mesurer. . . . Il n'y a science ni littérature qui puisse résister à ce pédantisme.”⁴

Such eloquent and virile words become his independence of thought, and the century's advancing freedom of expression.

Yet excessive individualism may become pure selfishness, as in the socially disastrous argument of the Troglodytes.⁵ The epigram that “ nous ne jugeons jamais des choses que par un retour secret que nous faisons sur nous-mêmes,”⁶ tends, in its introduction of a relativity too nearly infinite, neither to the credit of humanity, nor to the promotion of beauty. This latter truth is vividly realized in his illustrations of negroes who paint their gods black and their devil a dazzling white ; of “ certain peoples” who attribute to their Venus a repulsive malformation ; and indeed of the whole body of worshippers who ascribe to their deities the human face and inclinations.

Originality, too, may become singularity, and the bizarre, the grotesque.⁷ It is, however, usually the unthinking crowd, “ artisans grossiers des idées des autres,” who call a thinking man of character “ un homme singulier.” It may happen that “ la singularité consiste dans une manière fine de penser (?)”, qui

¹ VII, 314.

² VII, 170.

³ IV, 456.

⁴ VI, 202-3.

⁵ I, 77.

⁶ I, 206. He thinks this good enough to repeat, I, 273.

⁷ P. & F., II, 129.

a échappé aux autres.” And a singular man’s thoughts are so peculiarly his, that another lies in using them.¹

Finally he speaks strongly for originality in writing. If dictionaries of living languages are limited things,² grammar is likewise too restrictive of diction :³

“ Un homme d’esprit est, dans ses ouvrages, créateur de diction, de tours et de conceptions . . . un homme qui écrit bien n’écrit pas comme on a écrit, mais comme il écrit, et c’est souvent en parlant mal qu’il parle bien.”

Allowing for the antithetical paradox and for Ste-Beuve’s⁴ characterization of the last lines as “des idées fort dégagées,” the fact remains that Montesquieu’s line of thought here is strongly and convincingly individualistic.

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 129.

² *P. & F.*, II, 7–8.

³ And too authoritative, is the inference.

⁴ *C. de L.*, VII, 55.

BOOK III.

ÆSTHETIC DOCTRINE—FORMS OF ART.

CHAPTER IX.

MONTESQUIEU AND THE FINE ARTS—GENERAL VIEW.

“Depuis que je suis en Italie, j’ai ouvert les yeux sur les arts dont je n’avais absolument aucune idée.”¹ Such is his own statement of the revelation which Italy effected for him. The extent of this revelation and the degree of artistic acumen which he developed, largely in this journey of 1728–9, is what it is proposed to investigate throughout this Book.

The arts with which he became more or less familiar were, in the order of their importance for him, painting, architecture, sculpture, with something of music. Poetry cannot be included in the list.² The others formed certainly his chief preoccupation while in Italy³ and even to some extent before; for we find already at Vienna⁴ that the “immobile”⁵ M. Jacob, to whom he owes his idea of painting,⁶ has begun to act as his initiator and guide to the galleries. This was his first *cicerone*, of whom there were several.⁷

“Le progrès qu’il fait en quelques mois est surprenant.”⁸ If at Venice his eyes are still bandaged, from Padua to Florence, it is a “perpétuel enchantement.”⁹ Once at Florence he visited the Uffizi every morning for a month or more,¹⁰ and as a natural result

¹ VII, 227.

² Cf. *inf.*, p. 106. It is, in any case, best treated under Literature.

³ See Picot, *Voyages de Mont.*, esp. p. 44.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 542; *Voy.*, I, XXI.

⁵ VII, 224—though of amatory tendencies.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 542.

⁷ *Voyages*, XXVII, XXIX, 343—Bouchardon among others.

⁸ Picot, p. 44.

⁹ Fournier de Flaix, *Voyages de Mont.*, pp. 8–9.

¹⁰ VII, 226.

believed greatly in the Florentine school, whose geniuses “ont contribué plus quaucune ville d’Italie au renouvellement des arts.”¹ Even the Gothic² here is better than anywhere else. The published notes on Florence, which yet are not inconsiderable, form but a small part of what he actually wrote.³ And his minute study, particularly of the statuary, is well evidenced. This admiration is in accordance with the Vasari tradition.⁴

In Rome, where he spent five months, the arts continued their march, with equal pace, until architecture began, towards the end, somewhat to predominate.⁵ He finds Rome, frankly,

“la plus belle ville du monde. Si les arts étaient perdus, on les retrouverait dans Rome.”⁶

The “stones,” however, hardly tempt the future author of the *Romains* ;⁷ it is rather the Rome of the Renaissance which wins his suffrages.⁸

Those who are seeking fine works of art should never leave Rome for Naples, where it is easier to ruin one’s taste than to form it.⁹ He spent little over a week here, declaring that it took two minutes to see Naples, as against six months for the Imperial City.¹⁰

It may well be asked, as early as this, how much dependence can be placed on his susceptibility, his judgment, his very individuality in these matters, since he admits that he has frequently transcribed the opinion of M. Jacob and others.¹¹ We may reasonably expect quite a quantity of trite and unfelt criticism, of conventional admirations, or of unsafe *boutades*.

There will be sometimes a succession of “beau,” “très beau,” “très bon goût,” showing weariness rather than appreciation. Much of it, indeed, will not be criticism at all, but a sort of close description of churches, statues, paintings, or an enumeration of the facts and figures which his curiosity demanded and recorded.¹²

¹ *Voyages*, I, 169.

² See *inf.*, p. 71.

³ *Voyages*, I, xxvii.

⁴ *Voy.*, I, 339.

⁵ *Voy.*, I, xxx.

⁶ *Voy.*, II, p. 7.

⁷ See Bonnefon, *Voyages de Mont.*, p. 129.

⁸ Fournier de Flax, p. 11.

⁹ *Voy.*, II, 6.

¹⁰ *Voy.*, I, xxix.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 69.—But just after this even, come a series of “observations que j’ai faites depuis.”

¹² E. g., on the Tower of Pisa, *Voy.*, I, 157.

M. Doumic,¹ as well as another, has stated and even overstated the limitations with which we must reckon. Montesquieu, determined not to neglect Italy's resources, applies himself "avec conscience." As an attentive scholar, he follows his master, and "on le voit changer d'opinion en même temps que de cicerone." He approves of Raphael in conventional style, but reserves the fulness of eulogy for the Bolognese, as the then cult required. Pre-Renaissance and Gothic meant nothing to him, wherein he was no worse than his time. He abdicates his preferences in favor of the "classement officiel." He has tried his best to "prendre goût," for art, and thinks that he takes pleasure in it. In short :

"La vérité est qu'il n'y a rien de plus méthodique, mais aussi rien de plus froid que la façon dont il passe en revue les chefs-d'œuvre classés. Nul accent personnel. Pas un mot qui trahisse l'émotion directement ressentie . . . Montesquieu n'est ni touriste ni artiste."²

Much of this is quite true. It is only too sweeping. I am hardly convinced that he had no fixed opinions, that his great admiration for Raphael was conventional, that he took no real pleasure in this field. Individual observations and the personal note recur frequently, if not invariably, with some warmth of enthusiasm and with the peculiar type of judgment belonging to him. That will be attested in what follows. Few can fail to find in his remarks on the Gothic or on Michelangelo, in his distrust of *vaghezza* and his relish for *chiaroscuro*,³ the decided hall-marks of the Montesquieu that we are coming to know. His temper is still that of the curious investigator and of the polished man of breeding.⁴ Picot makes a good distinction in declaring that it is not always a question—

"des phrases admiratives telles qu'en peut écrire un voyageur auquel se révèle un art qu'il ne soupçonne pas, mais d'une étude approfondie ; il sent les beautés, et il veut savoir à quoi est due cette sensation."⁵

The attempt will be made then to convey succinctly whatever seems at once individual and critical in these remarks on the arts,

¹ *Voyages de Mont.*, pp. 929-30.

² *Ibid.*, p. 230.

³ See in order, *inf.*, pp. 71, 64, 61.

⁴ I hesitate, as yet, to say of "taste."

⁵ *Voyages de Mont.*, p. 44.

omitting perforce descriptions, minutiae, banal phrases and evident echoes—omitting, too, what would seriously clog our progress, the detail of technique and processes, the reviewing of individual names and works. The few exceptions to this last, will, it is hoped, prove strikingly illustrative. But there shall be included, in general, whatsoever things are just, beautiful or charming from the standpoint of the President.

In continuance of his views on the *locale* of the arts, he holds that, historically, all the arts founded on drawings are “*Graeco solo ortae.*”¹ The Greek religion sped their arts,² together with the fact that they constantly saw men naked. They had corporeal gods and athletes to represent, while other nations lacked such models.

These side-lights on religion are quite curious. He allows in general its artistic tendencies,³ but in detail he admits them only for the Greek mythology and mediaeval catholicism.

“Les Grecs, qui n’étaient point générés par la religion, portèrent l’art infinité plus loin,⁴ et les Romains ne se trouvèrent pas à une bien grande distance des Grecs, et les arts, par la religion, furent retardés en Egypte.”

Devotion, or Religion, encourages these arts. Catholicism, with its cult of images, helped in their renewal. Had Protestantism prevailed, we would have lost much.

To return to the Greeks, they were the fathers of sculpture, which it is almost certain they could have taken neither from the Egyptians nor the Persians—and he gives the arguments.⁵ It may possibly have been known in Etruria.⁶ But he abides finally by the Greeks, and derives thence all moderns :

¹ *Voy.*, II, 349.

² This connection, implying the ancillary relation of art, which we think of rather as aboriginal or Renaissance or nineteenth century, Montesquieu yet makes for himself *en plein dix-huitième*—“Je sens que je suis plus attaché à ma religion depuis que j’ai vu Rome et les chefs-d’œuvre de l’art qui sont dans les églises.” (*Voy.*, I, xxxiv.) Whence, remarks Doumic (*loc. cit.*), one might “avec beaucoup de bonne volonté,” draw all of the *Génie du Christianisme*.

³ What follows is from the end of the treatise, *De la manière gothique*, *Voy.*, II, 320–3 (cf. *inf.*, p. 71.)

⁴ *i. e.*, than the Egyptians.

⁵ *Voy.*, II, 348–50.

⁶ Elsewhere, again with apparent inconsistency, he says that Assyrius has

"On peut considérer avec quelle rapidité les Grecs allèrent de l'art à la perfection de l'art.¹ . . . Il n'y a pas un long trajet de la fondation des empires grecs jusques aux plus excellents peintres. . . . Nous avons inutilement travaillé depuis l'inondation des Barbares jusques à Giotto. Quelques prêtres grecs donnèrent à Cimabué et à Giotto quelques faibles rayons de l'art. Ils en resterent là jusques à ce que la vue des antiques² ouvrit l'esprit de Michel-Ange et de ses contemporains. Les Grecs eux seuls ont fait ce que nous n'avons pu faire que par eux."³

After the Greeks, the arts rose and fell with the Roman Empire—rose from Augustus to Hadrian and Trajan, to fall from that point.⁴ Among the moderns, he has little to remark concerning the Germans—whether for Rembrandt, Rubens⁵ or Rhine castles. But he says of Düsseldorf that it is easily the finest thing in Germany, and would be quite beautiful "even in Rome."⁶ The English, and, curiously enough, the French themselves receive very slight individual attention.

"proved" that the Greeks did not invent the arts, but had them from the Barbarians. Perhaps "prouve" should not carry too much weight. (*P. & F.*, II, 489.)

¹ Cf. for tragedy, *sup.*, p. 49.

² *N. B.*—for thorough discounting of Pre-Renaissance.

³ *Voy.*, II, 350–1.

⁴ *P. & F.*, I, 274—cf. *inf.*, under Literature, p. 124 f.

⁵ Some conventional adjectives for this painter, cf. *inf.*, p. 63.

⁶ *Voy.*, II, 186–7.

CHAPTER X.

PAINTING—RAPHAEL AND MICHELANGELO.

Our author has more to say about painting and painters than any other branch. He is quite clear as to certain cardinal principles, which he deems necessary. The greatest of these, of course, is “imitez la nature.”¹ That he does so is the chief merit of Raphael,² who submerges thereby his own manner—or mannerism :

“Raphael est presque le seul de tous les peintres qui ne soit pas maniére ; ce qui vient de l’imitation de la nature telle qu’elle est, et non de la façon que le peintre y met.”³

It has already been seen, however, that selection is demanded in the midst of imitation.⁴ “La peinture ne prend la nature que là où elle est belle.”⁵ He had rather see Raphael’s representation of the nude than a real Venus, for “la peinture ne nous représente que les beautés des femmes, et rien de ce qui peut en faire voir les défauts.”⁶ Selection may even, by the choice of here a trait and there a beauty, tend to the formation of a type and to the suppression of individual expression or resemblance. So in the apologue of the painter, who, desiring to create a goddess of beauty, brought together the fairest Greeks and chose from each “ce qu’elle avait de plus agréable.”⁷ Yet he criticises severely lack of expression,⁸ whole galleries “où tout se ressemble.”⁹

He is a friend to Order,¹⁰ within reason. It is important in grouping and in massing, in confusion itself, as in battlepieces ;¹¹ but symmetry in arrangement should be atoned for by variety in

¹ “En effet il faut que la peinture trouve l’art de nous montrer dans un tableau les mêmes choses que nous montre la nature.”—*Voy.*, I, 257, cf. *sup.* p. 30. Also VII, 124.

² *Voy.*, I, 229, 231. ³ *Voy.*, I, 240. ⁴ Cf. *sup.*, p. 30. ⁵ VII, 121.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 67. Cf. *sup.*, p. 30. ⁷ I, 239–40. ⁸ *Voy.*, I, 198.

⁹ “Ce qui est contre la nature”—*Voy.*, I, 227.

¹⁰ Cf. *sup.*, p. 39.

¹¹ VII, 122, 124.

attitude.¹ He lauds simplicity and condemns affected and inappropriate ornament.² It is characteristically Montesquian that he condemns *vaghezza* as lessening strength.—“Je me méfie toujours de la *vaghezza*: elle est aux dépens de la force”—and of the *chiaroscuro*, the bodies thus treated seem clearer, because feebler.³ A brief passage in praise of the Farnese gallery will give a résumé of his principles:

“ . . . les tableaux sont simples: peu de figures, et si bien ordonnées qu'il paraît qu'il y en a encore moins. Les paysages ne sont pas non plus remplis et confus: un beau ciel et peu de choses, comme la nature . . . ”⁴

A few of his more significant points, in the matter of technique, may be mentioned.⁵ There are “règles générales sur le dessin,”⁶ as to the inclining of the head, the advancement of the body in running, the leaning on one foot, which point chiefly to an avoidance of “coldness” and to the principles of variety and contrast. He believes in the smallness of extremities and *svelte* figures for grace, since Raphael did thus.⁷ For the same reason he prefers soft contours, not too marked or *sec*.⁸ *Chiaroscuro* is one of his favorite points:

“ Ce sont les reflets qui font saillir les corps, et la science du peintre consiste à disposer les choses de façon que les lumières, les ombres, les reflets, fassent l'effet désiré.”⁹

Of the various exponents of painting, he can admire in the ancients only their drawing, their attitudes, and particularly their secret for conserving colors.¹⁰ The Primitives struck him as impossible. Especially horrible are the efforts in the Campo Santo at Pisa, where the bad taste and the “imaginaires singulières” of that time are well displayed.¹¹ Giotto is a little better than the others. He finds that the Venetian school “avait beaucoup de facilité, et de hardiesse, et de grands traits;”¹² but their attitudes are forced.¹³ The Flemish, on the contrary, have

¹ VII, 126.

² *Voy.*, I, 259.

³ *Voy.*, I, 249, cf. I, 238.

⁴ *Voy.*, I, 226.

⁵ As a rule I cannot think him the inventor of the technical *dicta*.

⁶ *Voy.*, I, 241–2.

⁷ *Voy.*, I, 228.

⁸ *Voy.*, I, 84.

⁹ *Voy.*, I, 234, cf. pp. 249, 256.

¹⁰ *Voy.*, I, 198.

¹¹ *Voy.*, I, 158.

¹² *Voy.*, I, 85.

¹³ VII, 136.

no "grands traits,"¹ nor majesty.² His solitary observation concerning the French school is that :

"Les Français ont d'assez belles expressions des passions dans les visages ; mais leur coloris est faible et n'a pas de force."³

Among individuals, his preferences on the whole seem rather for strength than for sweetness. He has an ecstatic admiration for Giulio Romano, whose work at Mantua was done in a way "que l'on peut regarder comme le chef-d'œuvre de la peinture."⁴ His *ordonnance*—especially in battles, where others make confusion—his costuming and his drawing show great knowledge. Daniele da Volterra is another favorite, whose works are admirable.⁵ It is in regard to this painter that M. Doumic accuses Montesquieu of timidly renouncing his preferences in favor of the "classement officiel."⁶ But it will be seen in this passage that the President keeps his preferences, exactly in spite of the usual ranking :

"Mais j'avoue que j'ai trouvé la *Descente de Croix* de Daniel de Volterre . . . au-dessus de ce tableau,⁷ quoiqu'on le mette le deuxième de Rome, et celui de Daniel le troisième."⁸ It is quite true, however, as M. Doumic says, that there is some "fracas des éloges" for the Carracci, Guidi and Dominichino.⁹

Of the other Italian painters—and it is practically only the Italians that he discusses—he approves the "majesty" of Veronese's draperies,¹⁰ the "grandes bouches"¹¹ and that fusion of colors which is in Correggio's priceless *Notte* alone.¹² Carlo Dolci has at any rate a finished manner.¹³ Guido Reni is notable for grace, and his *Martyr of the Innocents* (at Bologna) is deemed not inferior to the *Aurora*, for color and expression.¹⁴ Titian's *Tribuna Venus* is admirable—"vous croyez voir la chair et le corps même."¹⁵ In the *Tribute-Money*, the facial expression is

¹ *Voy.*, I, 85.

² VII, 141.

³ *Voy.*, I, 85–6.

⁴ *Voy.*, II, 116–7.

⁵ *Voy.*, I, 207.

⁶ *Voyages de Mont.*, pp. 929–30.

⁷ The St. Jerome of Dominichino.

⁸ *Voy.*, I, 247.

⁹ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁰ VII, 134.

¹¹ *A propos* of the "Madonna chi adora," *Voy.*, II, 338.

¹² *Voy.*, II, 97.

¹³ *Voy.*, II, 340.

¹⁴ *Voy.*, II, 95.

¹⁵ *Voy.*, II, 337.

what seizes him,¹ as also in Leonardo's *Last Supper*, where he dwells upon the different passions depicted on the faces of the Apostles.²—Out of Italy, Rubens' *Judgment* comes in for a word of praise.³

At Florence, where there is “rien que d'exquis,”⁴ he was particularly interested in the chamber of *Selbstbildnisse*, as affording excellent opportunity for the comparison of manners. Elsewhere,⁵ however, he fears that the sample is too small, a painter's manner coming out far better in a “grande ordonnance.” He traces, in an amusing way, national characteristics in the various groups—the French displaying an inexpensive finery, the Italians with an air of singularity and vivacity, the Flemish grave and offering, as more in their line, a little *genre* painting within a painting. Generally all have “un air qui marque du génie.”⁶

But the most of his study and appreciation is for two masters, whom, though one is equally prominent in sculpture, it is best not to divide in their death. He is nowhere more individual, more outspoken, than in his valuations of Raphael and of Michelangelo.

If the first may have copied the second,⁷ if he dealt perhaps with lesser subjects,⁸ yet he is as renowned for grace as the other is for force.⁹ *Grâce*¹⁰ and *douceur*¹¹ are among his specific marks. But there are also a great simplicity¹² and purity,¹³ a willingness not to strike at first, the ability which promises little and pays much.¹⁴ He shuns the ordinary artifice of weakening colors for distance, but shows his art in the gradation of lights.¹⁵ Roundness and smallness of contour, the slightest points in attitude, the use of little contrasts, just distribution in *chiaroscuro*, all these are of his mastery.¹⁶

If his works do not strike at once, it is because “il imite trop bien la nature ; de façon qu'on la prend pour elle-même : car je

¹ *Voy.*, II, 97.

² *Voy.*, I, 97.

³ *Voy.*, II, 186.

⁴ VII, 227.

⁵ *Voy.*, II, 339.

⁶ *Voy.*, II, 339-40.

⁷ Because, he thinks, the God of the Loggie resembles that of the Sistine Chapel.—*Voy.*, II, 8.

⁸ VII, 348.—Though one hardly sees how that can be.

⁹ IV, 356.

¹⁰ *Voy.*, I, 256.

¹¹ *Voy.*, I, 257.

¹² VII, 134, 136, *Voy.*, I, 238.

¹³ VII, 348.

¹⁴ *Voy.*, I, 230.

¹⁵ *Voy.*, I, 227.

¹⁶ *Voy.*, I, 228-230.

ne suis point frappé d'admiration quand je vois un homme ou une femme." He uses no constrained attitudes for the sake of an artificial chiaroscuro, and a forced variety. Thus his *naturel* makes his greatness.¹

Among his masterpieces, the *St. Peter* is a fine example of the gradation of lights.² This also marks the story of *Psyche*, as well as the contrast in uniformity of the expression.³ The Loggie awaken the old cry :

"Quelle correction de dessin ! Quelle beauté ! Quel naturel ! Ce n'est point de la peinture, c'est la nature même ! . . . Enfin, il semble que Dieu se sert de la main de Raphaël pour créer."⁴

The *School of Athens* excites the remark that Raphael is not maniétré.⁵ All his best qualities appear in the *Transfiguration*, which has, however, the slight blemish that the accessory of the possédé is too large in the foreground.⁶ But of all his paintings—and our Gascon declares that Raphael must have lived a thousand years to paint what he did⁷—the *Madonna della Sedia* "effaces" every Virgin he has seen.⁸ It is "autant au-dessus des ouvrages ordinaires de Raphaël que Raphaël est au-dessus des peintres ordinaires."⁹

He is all praise for the Urbinate; Michelangelo he occasionally condemns; yet the recognition of the latter's more Cyclopean genius is constantly felt. His great taste can be seen dawning in his predecessors and continuing in those whom he left behind.¹⁰ In his very sketches "on trouve du grand,"¹¹ and they should be treasured like those lines which Virgil never finished.¹²

He too shows all of the antique simplicity,¹³ making ornament a secondary consideration.¹⁴ A prime characteristic is his nobility.¹⁵ He touched nothing which he did not enoble, lending majesty even to a Bacchus.

For his paintings, the *Passion* is to be noted for the calmness of the Virgin, "instruite de ce grand mystère."¹⁶ There is a *sottise*

¹ *Voy.*, I, 230-1.

² *Voy.*, I, 233.

³ *Voy.*, I, 227.

⁴ *Voy.*, I, 239.

⁵ *Voy.*, I, 240.

⁶ *Voy.*, I, 247.

⁷ *Voy.*, II, 114.

⁸ *Voy.*, I, 188.

⁹ *Voy.*, II, 352.

¹⁰ VII, 226.

¹¹ VII, 142.

¹² VII, 29; *Voy.*, II, 327.

¹³ *Voy.*, II, 6.

¹⁴ *Voy.*, II, 327.

¹⁵ VII, 141-2.

¹⁶ VII, 141.

in his *Adam and Eve*,¹ repeated in the *Judgment*, which also lacks perspective.² However :

“Rien ne donne une plus grande idée du génie de Michel-Ange, que cette peinture, et je ne crois pas que les Loges de Raphaël valent mieux . . . Il y a dans ses peintures une majesté, une force dans les attitudes, une grande manière qui étonne l'esprit.”

In his architecture, he evinces a mastering originality.³ None knew better his art, and none has played more with proportion. “Avec une connaissance exacte de tout ce qui peut faire plaisir,” he had an art apart for each work.

In St. Peter's, however, it is the exact proportion which mitigates the massiveness, making the immense dome seem even light.⁴ There is no single point of sufficient smallness to serve as a standard by which to judge its size. “Mais à mesure que l'on examine, l'oeil la voit s'agrandir, l'étonnement augmente.” It is only on reflection that its full beauty is felt.⁵ He does not care for the façade,⁶ but as a whole it is the “merveilleux qui étonne.”⁷

The Porta di San Giovanni is “admirable pour son rustique et sa force.”⁸—As to the San Lorenzo, the whole design seems to him “pitoyable,” the pilasters too short, the *ensemble* inharmonious.⁹ But the New Sacristy¹⁰—and here is where architecture merges into sculpture—is “noble, simple et belle.”¹¹ Here the *grand goût* reigns. For the statues, if we find “figures fort ressenties,” if the women are too muscular,¹² yet the contours and proportions of the men are most just, the four statues and the two princes are all admirable in attitude.¹¹ This is the last word of praise : “De tous les sculpteurs il n'y a que Michel-Ange qui soit comparable aux Anciens.”¹¹

¹ *Voy.*, I, 185.

² *Voy.*, I, 246.

³ VII, 143.

⁴ VII, 136–7.

⁵ *Voy.*, I, 238.

⁶ *Voy.*, II, 33.

⁷ *Voy.*, I, 75.

⁸ *Voy.*, II, 35.

⁹ *Voy.*, I, 189–190.

¹⁰ This, it may be recalled, is the only part for which Michelangelo is responsible *in tutto*.

¹¹ *Voy.*, II, 346.

¹² *Voy.*, II, 353.

CHAPTER XI.

SCULPTURE.

The sculptor's art seems to appeal to Montesquieu much less than the painter's. He finds it 'cold,' and his phrases of admiration are apt to be short ejaculations, more forcible than convincing.¹ There is little of the delighted lingering, the true lover's passion for single works, and there is decidedly more study from the historical standpoint, particularly for the ancients. Few moderns are mentioned.

Comparatively resourceless by the side of the painter, the sculptor can induct fire and movement into his works only "en mettant ses figures dans de belles attitudes et leur donnant de beaux airs de tête."² He must put them into action, if the position is stiff: "car la sculpture est naturellement froide." We have already heard of contrast in attitudes,³ after symmetry in parts. Statuary has the further disadvantage that it must be viewed on all sides, which makes it more difficult as compared with painting.⁴ "Ainsi ce qui est beau en peinture, où il n'y a qu'une vue, est souvent très laid en sculpture."⁵ He does not admit the use of light for relief or perspective, since one side should not shine at the expense of the other.⁶ He recommends the pyramidal formation in a group.⁷ He has paid some attention to contours and enumerates four or five kinds—of women, noble men,⁸ powerful men,⁹ old men and rustics.⁴

¹ Many of the statues are "admirable" without specification. *Voy.*, I, 241, 267). There are also "autres statues exquises en grand nombre," (*Voy.*, I, 217), whose exquisiteness is not analysed.

²*P. & F.*, II, 70.

³ VII, 126. Cf. *sup.*, p. 39.

⁴*P. & F.*, II, 72.

⁵ *Voy.*, I, 271.

⁶*Voy.*, I, 272. This seems rather hard on 'variety' and 'contrast.'

⁷*Voy.*, I, 267.

⁸ Round, like women—*e. g.*, the *Apollo*.

⁹*e. g.*, the Hercules Farnese.

He makes the singular statement—which, however, he is in two minds about inserting—that, since the human race has probably changed its form :

“Les sculpteurs d’aujourd’hui ne doivent donc prendre pour modèle une statue grecque, ni juger des statues grècques par nos figures modernes.”¹

But the Ancients are worthy of all admiration, and therefore, according to his own principles,² of imitation. The cause for their superiority is the old one : “On voit dans les antiques la nature presque toujours imitée.”³ Again, they treated draping better,³ and that for two reasons—our Carrara marble is harder, and our costumes are often graceless.⁴ By the *finesse* of draperies, by the degree of softness and roundness in the limbs, by the treatment of the hair, beard and ears, we may judge as to the relative antiquity of a statue.⁵ The ancients sinned, however, in two respects : in having the drapery wetted, *collé* to the flesh, for revealing better the nude ;⁶ and in badly representing children as too well-formed and muscular.⁷

We must distinguish here between the Greek and the Roman taste.⁸ The Greek statues, generally naked, show beards and small heads. Their race, with Apelles and Phidias,⁹ went farther in sculpture than the Romans.¹⁰ The art of the latter declined as the Christians prevailed.¹¹ Hasty and poor work was done, partly from the absence of the Emperors in the provinces ; even as it befell in Florence, between Giovanni da Bologna and Foggini.¹²

For special statues he has sworn an eternal fidelity to the Medici Venus.¹³ Leaving out of account the disproportionate accessories,¹⁴ it is a model not of Venus, but of beauty itself, “et

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 205—But he proceeds to recommend, just below, the Medici Venus as the feminine model for all time.

² Cf. *sup.*, p. 50, where the English were “singular” in admiring without imitating.

³ *Voy.*, II, 306.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 71.

⁵ *Voy.*, II, 304.

⁶ *Voy.*, I, 269.

⁷ *Voy.*, I, 265.

⁸ *Voy.*, II, 305–7.

⁹ “Ces petits insensés de Grecs,” VII, 26.

¹⁰ *Voy.*, II, 307.

¹¹ Cf. *sup.*, p. 59.

¹² *Voy.*, II, 303–4.

¹³ *P. & F.*, II, 75—“que je regarde comme le meilleur prédicateur qu’ait jamais eu les Florentins.”

¹⁴ The Cupids—work of an apprentice.

la décrire c'est dire comme une femme doit être et comme on la doit représenter."¹ There are detailed observations on several other statues at Florence. He notes and praises particularly the *Antinous*, and *Prometheus*, *The Wrestlers*; the *Leda* and *Bacchus* of Michelangelo.² At Rome we have little more than hasty visits and slight unfelt phrases. He was beginning to weary of it. The *Apollo* might have seduced him, had he not seen Venus first.³ The *Gladiator*, the *Apollo*, the *Antinous*, the *Laokoön*, the *Hercules Farnese*,—are mentioned, and barely mentioned, as the best.⁴

The only modern on whom he dwells, is, naturally enough, Bernini. A passing fancy for this pretty sculptor—who could at any rate give long odds on *morbidezza*,⁵ and did Borghese's head with wonderful realism⁶—was later abundantly corrected. He has ruined the Roman School;⁷ he is *maniéré* and a *petit-maître*;⁷ his *David* is heavy, and his *Daphne* too daintily round.⁸

¹ *Voy.*, II, 329.

² *Voy.*, II, 314 ff.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 75.

⁴ *Voy.*, I, 241, 267.

⁵ *Voy.*, I, 191.

⁶ *Voy.*, I, 267.—He was also excellent in a large composition, where his incorrect drawing showed less, and very dexterous in carving small folds, etc. (*Voy.*, I, 268).

⁷ *Voy.*, I, 256.

⁸ *Voy.*, I, 267.

CHAPTER XII.

ARCHITECTURE—THE GOTHIC.

There is a fugitive passage in the *Pensées et Fragments* which shows that Montesquieu understood that, in dealing with architecture, we leave the domain of the representative or imitative arts and come to a class which is purely presentative.¹

It may be well to hear him expand his proposition that architecture is invariable in its orders and proportions.² Our pleasure in a building is excited by certain proportions between the height of a column and its diameter.³ There are (only) five degrees of proportion which are pleasurable, and these make the five orders, Tusean, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite.⁴ These are incapable of change, by ornament, by disguise, or what not, whether in number or in relation. For:—

“Ce ne sont pas des beautés arbitraires qui puissent être suppléées par d’autres. Cela est pris dans la nature, et il me serait facile d’expliquer la raison physique de ceci.”⁵

This hidebound *dictum*, startling in its narrowness, may be reserved for further comment. He adds a few stray principles, referring to the importance of *saillie*,⁶ and the fact that obscurity may increase the effect of greatness in churches.⁷ He appreciates that the artistic grouping of buildings is a consideration.⁸ At Rome, he is glad that the great masters have built their churches

¹ *A propos de saillie*—“car, si la peinture, qui n'est qu'une imitation, s'attache si fort à faire fuir ou avancer les corps, que sera-ce de l'architecture?” (*P. & F.*, II, 74.)

² Cf. *sup.*, p. 39.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 76–7.

⁴ Though this last need hardly count. Elsewhere (*P. & F.*, II, 73), he objects to a certain mingling of the orders—“l’œil ne peut passer de la grossièreté du rustique à la gentillesse de l’ionien ou du corinthien.”

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 77.

⁶ Quoted, preceding page, n. 1.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 74.

⁸ At Pisa—*Voy.*, I, 161.

so differently,¹ whereas in France all buildings are uniform.² Uniformity is a relative matter. Were our sight more feeble and confused, we should need more uniformity.³ Were it more distinct, and our souls larger in grasp, we should require more ornaments. So far as ornament means the enriching of pilasters and columns, that is justified ;⁴ but where it means *colifichets*,⁵ or a multiplicity in richness, as with the Neapolitans,⁶ it is distinctly of “mauvais goût.” The Gothic is fatiguing with ornament and enigmas.⁷ The Greeks, with their few and great divisions, are still his model for majesty, simplicity and yet variety :

“L’architecture grecque, au contraire, paraît uniforme ; mais, comme elle a les divisions qu’il faut, . . . elle a cette variété qui la fait regarder avec plaisir.”

Among the monuments, he thinks the Verona amphitheatre one of the finest bits of antiquity.⁸ But the most of his admiration is for the Italian churches. The Florence *Duomo*, in its majestic beauty,⁹ is one of the greatest of edifices.¹⁰ Gothic though it be, it represents “le grand simple.” It was a great stroke of genius for “ce siècle rude, où l’architecture grecque n’était pas connue.”¹¹ So for the Cologne Cathedral, in the same *genre*, whose *légèreté* he especially commends.¹² Notre-Dame is simply a “superbe édifice.”¹³

There is some description of San Marco, whose mosaic and *marqueterie* impress him.¹⁴ The Cathedral at Frascati surpasses any thing in France,¹⁵ and the Church of St. Francis at Rimini is “magnificent.”¹⁶

There are three fine palaces in the world : the Luxembourg, the Pitti, and the Farnese at Rome.¹⁷ The Barberini looks too much like a fortress.¹⁸ What strikes him at Versailles is the “envie impuissante qu’on voit partout de faire de belles choses.”¹⁹ He thinks little of Mansard, who might have added wings till doomsday, without achieving the great.²⁰ And he considers that

¹ There may be then, at least, variety within the five orders.

² *Voy.*, I, 236.

³ VII, 118.

⁴ VII, 18.

⁵ *Voy.*, I, 5.

⁶ *Voy.*, II, 9.

⁷ VII, 124.

⁸ *Voy.*, I, 87.

⁹ *Voy.*, II, 349.

¹⁰ *Voy.*, II, 343.

¹¹ *Voy.*, II, 351.

¹² *Voy.*, II, 185.

¹³ I, 210.

¹⁴ *Voy.*, I, 66.

¹⁵ *Voy.*, II, 38.

¹⁶ *Voy.*, II, 79.

¹⁷ *Voy.*, I, 274.

¹⁸ *Voy.*, II, 37.

¹⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 77.

²⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 78.

Mansard the younger showed much stupidity in applying his uncle's, Mansard the elder's *mansarde* to the palace.¹ This was intended only as an economic device for *bourgeois*¹—according to which saying, Paris to-day should be tenanted solely by that class.

His chief concern in architecture, however, was to discover whether or not a building was Gothic, and if so, whether or not it had redeeming features. In his condemnation of the ‘Gothic’—which meant for him about what ‘Boeotian’ meant for Landor—he is on a par with his age. He has left a treatise on the subject,² which we may pass in review.

The Gothic manner, he begins, is the manner of no particular people. It was known in Rome before the Goths.³ With the exception of the flourishing of sculpture under Hadrian, the arts had fallen as Paganism yielded to the new Christianity;⁴ and there are abundant indications in the Florence galleries of this decadence previous to the inundation of the barbarians.

It was not then the national Gothic manner. “C'est la manière de la naissance ou de la fin de l'art.”⁵ The progress, so far as sculpture is concerned, is through drawing to attitude, movement and finally grace. In art's decline, grace becomes unknown. Soon movement and variety of attitude are lost :

“On ne songe plus qu'à faire bien ou mal les figures et on les met dans une position unique. C'est ce qu'on appelle *la manière gothique*.

“Cette position unique est celle qui se présente d'abord à ceux qui ignorent l'art.”

It is marked by stiffness, hardness, an abundance of symmetry, and, in the end, by ignorance of drawing. These stages, of decline and of rise respectively, are seen in the reversion from the age of Pericles to the Low Empire; and in the development from the mediæval renewal to the Renaissance.

¹ *Voy.*, II, 74.

² *De la manière gothique*, *Voy.*, II, 367–375.

³ Neither in architecture nor in sculpture did the taste come with the Goths, who certainly brought no workmen with them, (*Voy.*, II, 304). They did not introduce the manner, but they confirmed it, in making ignorance reign. (*Ibid.*, p. 303).

⁴ Cf. *sup.*, p. 59.

⁵ “Cest le goût de l'ignorance,” *Voy.*, II, 304. Cf. *Voy.*, I, 125.

He goes on to explain¹ that though the Greeks took their art from the Egyptians, the latter, being ‘Gothic’ without knowledge, could not father the Greek perfection. These Egyptians, poor as to attitude, could draw admirably. This is explained by a passage from Plato, to the effect that the Egyptians, restrained by their religious laws, were bound always to work in the same style; but they could perfect that style, *i. e.*, drawing merely.²

Elsewhere, he has still more to say concerning the Gothic, as meaning ignorance :

“Lorsqu'on ne connaît pas les véritables beautés, on s'imagine d'abord que la multiplicité des ornements donnera de la grâce, et que la beauté augmentera à proportion du nombre des choses qui composeront le tout . . . Il n'y a que les beaux génies qui soient d'abord capables du grand simple.”³

We have seen that the Gothic, as opposed to the Greek, may seem varied :⁴

“Mais la confusion des ornements fatigue par leur petitesse . . . de manière qu'elle déplaît par les endroits mêmes qu'on a choisis pour la rendre agréable.”⁵

Hence it is an enigma, an obscure poem. The “singular” Borromini has imagined a new architecture, a Gothic *mis en règle*;⁶ he has thereby departed from the ancients; and his precedent should never be followed. Montesquieu dislikes “ce droit et cette raideur” of the *genre*.⁷ He condemns statues in that style.⁸

When it comes to illustrations, he feels bound to apologize for his own castle, “gothique à la vérité mais orné de dehors charmants.”⁹ It is chiefly the bad taste of the thing that spoils it. At Naples, with ornaments and magnificence, he finds “aucun goût : un goût gothique.”¹⁰

At Florence, the Gothic is better than elsewhere. So for *Santa Maria Novella*, the *Duomo*, and the *Campanile*¹¹—“Il fallait que

¹ What follows is hardly very relative to the Gothic, but is nicely elucidative of several other points. Cf. for the Greek *provenance*, *sup.*, p. 58; for religion, *sup.*, pp. 58-9.

² The end of the treatise has been given, in connection with religion, *sup.*, p. 58.

³ *Voy.*, II, 304-5.

⁴ Cf. *sup.*, p. 70.

⁵ VII, 124.

⁶ *Voy.*, II, 32, 34.

⁷ *Voy.*, II, 303.

⁸ *Voy.*, II, 303, 355, 360.

⁹ VII, 271.

¹⁰ *Voy.*, II, 6.

¹¹ *Voy.*, I, 169; *Voy.*, II, 344-5. He admires, for the *Campanile*, its gradation, its composition, and the fact that “les ornements sont dans le tout et non dans les parties.”

ces grands génies furent supérieurs à l'art de ce temps-là." They executed with taste the things of bad taste. The *Duomo* at Pisa also is conceded to be beautiful, and the little Spina has a surprising *légèreté*¹—

"C'est le morceau gothique le plus achevé que j'aie vu, et le petit ouvrage a de la beauté autant qu'il peut y en avoir dans un mauvais goût."

He is forced to admit that the Gothic seems better suited to churches than another architecture,² since it is different from the actual, and the Deity should be distinguished. As to the point of *légèreté*,³ this may be allied with his distinction of two kinds, the "gothique léger" and another. The distinction, his editor thinks, would correspond with that between the *ogival* and the (late) Romanesque.⁴ Certainly several of the above remarks must apply to the latter style. It is sufficiently evident throughout that the term 'gothique' is used in the old, loose, depreciatory sense, without its later definite significance.

¹ *Voy.*, I, 156–7.

² *Voy.*, I, 43.

³ Cf. *sup.*, p. 39.

⁴ *Voy.*, I, 299.

CHAPTER XIII.

MUSIC AND DANCING.

The remarks on music deal chiefly with the Italians and with operas. He advances the paradox that the more imperfect the ‘art’ of music, the more surprising have been its effects.¹ The reason is that early peoples had louder² instruments which dinned into ears “qui ne sont pas accoutumées à la musique ou plutôt à une musique meilleure, qui plaît plus, quoiqu’elle émeuve moins.” But as the new kind began to please more, the old began to move less.

From this he springs to a recognition of the higher harmony.³ The principle of *ars celare artem* again appears in this :

“Les musiciens ont reconnu que la musique qui se chante le plus facilement est la plus difficile à composer.”⁴

Although, in an incidental way, he may call the tenderest music the most divine, yet on the whole it appears that the sentimental still fails to please him. He admires the *accords*, the melody and harmony at Paphos, while distrustful of “cette langueur qu’on rencontre si souvent en voulant chercher ce qui touche.”⁵ He is contemptuous of “l’art de faire jurer une discordante guitare,”⁶ as well as of those who would have the blessed play upon the flute.⁷

It has been seen that music, among the Greeks, contributed to “adoucir les moeurs.”⁸ This is on the authority of the “judicious” Polybius, with whom agree Plato, Aristotle and “all

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 67–8.

² The recognition of emotion as a factor is something ; but it is certainly very catholic to include noise among the varieties of music.

³ II, 192—“des dissonances . . . concourent à l’accord total.”

⁴ VII, 140.

⁵ VII, 487.

⁶ I, 260.

⁷ I, 389.

⁸ Cf. *sup.*, p. 28.

the ancients.”¹ It is one of their political principles. The reason is that warlike exercises needed to be tempered by some softer means, and music was the most appropriate for this.² It would be good for those of us who are addicted to the chase, which, like the exercises of the Greeks, excites only the rougher passions.

“La musique les excite toutes, et peut faire sentir à l’âme la douceur, la pitié, la tendresse, le doux plaisir.³ Nos auteurs de morale, qui, parmi nous, proscrivent si fort les théâtres, nous font assez sentir le pouvoir que la musique a sur nos âmes.”⁴

He says in another place that the Chinese legislators likewise apply music “pour les moeurs . . . comme les Grecs.”⁵ Yet in the Bacchanals, “le long usage du chant, surtout les hurlements, abrutissent encore.”⁶

All these are readily seen to be economic considerations.

He values particularly the Italian music, although he considers their concerts suitable for infernal punishment.⁷ The Italians are most susceptible, are transported musically, in comparison with the English.⁸ Their excellent church music makes even devotion delicious.⁹ In general—

“Dans mon séjour en Italie, je me suis extrêmement converti sur la musique italienne. Il me semble que, dans la musique française, les instruments accompagnent la voix et que dans l’italienne, ils la prennent et l’enlèvent. La musique italienne se plie mieux que la française, qui semble roide. C’est comme un lutteur plus agile. L’une entre dans l’oreille, l’autre la meut.”¹⁰

Again, he thinks it astonishing that the inconstant French have kept their old music, their old airs, the operas of Lulli.¹¹ The Italians demand always new operas. “Serait-ce que leur musique

¹ III, 160.

² III, 162–3.

³ Thus finally admitting sentiment.

⁴ III, 163.

⁵ P. & F., I, 155.

⁶ Which seems fully as reasonable—*Mél. in.*, p. 127.

⁷ VII, 479.

⁸ IV, 149.

⁹ P. & F., II, 243.

¹⁰ P. & F., II, 69. Concerning the French, in this form also, he is not enthusiastic, and says only this of their chief composers: “Rameau est Corneille; et Lulli, Racine; Lulli fait de la musique comme un Ange; Rameau fait de la musique comme un Diable” (P. & F., II, 69).

¹¹ *Voy.*, I, 220.

est plus susceptible de donner du nouveau?" They can no longer suffer the old style.

Opera, indeed, is the Italian specialty that he prefers.¹ "Tout ce qui est spectacle charme les yeux italiens," and it would be useless to give them an opera "sans décorations." No one would go.² Their rapture at an opera is audible.³ Formerly the finest in Europe were to be heard at Venice; but now they are no better there than in most of the other towns.⁴

It is the whole *genre*, however, whether at home or abroad, that meets with his approbation. He may well make Rica declare that what goes on, for society's ceremonies, is the same at the *Français* and the Opéra—all the difference being that they speak at one and sing at the other.⁵ That he takes the matter seriously is evident from another passage, where he says the moderns are the inventors of this kind of spectacle, "uniquement fait pour ravir les sens et pour enchanter l'imagination."⁶ It is made to be admired and not to be examined, and "la raison s'est indignée en vain" against the *ressorts* which it employs—*ressorts* which tragedy rejects. These are drawn from "la Fable ancienne et moderne," and most happily used.⁷

"Tout ce que nous avons de plus exquis et de plus délicat, tout ce que le coeur a de plus tendre se trouve dans les opéras de Quinaut (*sic*), Fontenelle, La Motte, Danchet, Roi, etc."

The choice of names is the only thing that makes us hesitate in accepting this verdict. He expresses somewhat the same ideas in the *Goût*. If opera is, in a way, contrary to reason, it should yet depart from it as little as possible.⁸ In Italy, he could not bear to hear Cato and Caesar sing *ariettes* on the stage; and in drawing their subjects from history, the Italians show less taste than the French, who draw them "de la Fable ou des romans." By the introduction of the marvelous, "l'inconvénient du chant diminué," what would be extraordinary seeming even natural,

¹ "J'ai bien pris goût à ces opéras italiens," *Voy.*, I, 186.

² *Voy.*, I, 223.

³ IV, 149.

⁴ *Voy.*, I, 24.

⁵ I, 122; cf. *inf.*, p. 115.

⁶ *P. & F.*, I, 226.

⁷ "L'esprit même y a gagné" (*Ibid.*).

⁸ VII, 144; cf. *sup.*, p. 50.

magic and mythology appearing almost reasonable. In this one point, then, the Italians are inferior.

He speaks of songs only in a secondary way. He ridicules the political or topical *chanson*,¹ and mentions the convulsive effect of certain ditties, presumably Bacchanalian.² Apollo would disown such efforts; but Bacchus prefers “un désordre enjoué à la contrainte de l'exakte harmonie.”³ The President seems to remember the *Etrennes de la St. Jean*.⁴

Dancing and even “le jeu,” as somewhat cognate subjects from his own point of view, may receive summary treatment here. There is one tolerably significant, as well as tolerably *malin* passage on the dance :

“La danse nous plaît par la légèreté, par une certaine grâce, par la beauté et la variété des attitudes, par sa liaison avec la musique, la personne qui danse étant comme un instrument qui accompagne; mais surtout elle plaît par une disposition de notre cerveau, qui est telle qu'elle ramène en secret l'idée de tous les mouvements à de certains mouvements, la plupart des attitudes à de certains attitudes.”⁵

Delicate people are satisfied with gentle dances, while coarse people require them according to their kind.⁶ The Romans are satisfied with very poor dancing, which they confuse with jumping.⁷

By relation to the *motif* of surprise, games of chance pique us.⁸ This pleasure may be analyzed into the elements of avarice, vanity at fortune's preference, and curiosity for the spectacle.⁹ The last emotion is particularly excited by piquet and *hombre*.¹⁰ In other games—“jeux folâtres”—our pleasure comes largely from seeing another in a ludicrous situation.¹¹

¹I, 349. ²VII, 367. ³VII, 474. ⁴Cf. *inf.*, p. 91. ⁵VII, 131.

⁶P. & F., II, 79—referring to the “danse de la Prévost” and the Camargo respectively.

⁷Voy., I, 221. ⁸VII, 128. ⁹VII, 130. ¹⁰VII, 146–7.

¹¹VII, 45—All this is from the *Goût*, though its artistic reference is not immediately evident.

CHAPTER XIV.

LANDSCAPE—GARDENING.

His opinions on this subject are naturally allied with his sentiment for nature.¹ He would be catholic enough to appreciate both the art of gardens, and the beauty of natural scenery, and seeks to give reasons why each should please us.

For the former, we like “un jardin bien régulier,” because it gives the sense of enlargement to vision, of observing with extensive view, when ordinarily in towns our range is so restricted.² Art aids us and shows us a nature who would conceal herself. Art is certainly better than a hidden nature. Yet—when brought face to face with the real thing—

“Quand nous trouvons de belles situations, quand notre vue en liberté peut voir au loin des prés, des ruisseaux, des collines, et ces dispositions qui sont, pour ainsi dire, créées exprès, elle est bien autrement enchantée que lorsqu’elle voit les jardins de Le Nôtre.”³

Accordingly we like better a landscape painting than the plan of the finest garden in the world.

Yet gardens have their beauties, and even regular gardens.⁴ We prefer a good arrangement to a confusion of trees for a variety of reasons: we can see farther; the unit is a large alley and not a small tree; we are grateful for the novelty of the arrangement, its expense, its difficulty.⁵ We must combat nature, or she would ruin everything; whence “un jardin négligé nous est insupportable.” He dwells, in the *Temple de Gnide*, on enchanted and “delicious” gardens.⁶

¹ Cf. *sup.*, p. 31.

² VII, 120–1.

³ VII, 121. He speaks elsewhere (*P. & F.*, II, 78) of the too great regularity and sameness of Le Nôtre.

⁴ VII, 130.

⁵ Cf. *sup.*, Qualities, p. 43.

⁶ II, 16.

As to his practical application of his theories, we find, indeed, that he renovated La Brède largely according to English ideas, without much reference to Le Nôtre.¹ He thought that it had "dehors charmants,"² and was one of the most agreeable places in France, since nature was there freshly matutinal.³

Vian has undertaken, with some enterprise, to show that Montesquieu injected his qualities of mind into the reconstruction of La Brède.⁴ The park speaks scorn of exactitude and symmetry. It has extension, grand lines and variety which seems confusion at first.

"La variété, l'élégance, la profondeur, l'imprévu, la netteté, la vigueur, toutes les qualités de Montesquieu sont là."

Others have not found them. Hémon⁵ observes that Montesquieu does not disregard order and symmetry in his theory; and Brunetièr⁶ says simply that Vian abuses his prerogatives as biographer.

¹Vian, pp. 131-2.

²vii, 271.

³vii, 402.

⁴*Histoire*, pp. 131-2.

⁵*Cours de litt.*, i, 19. Yet Thomas seems to approve—*Vieilles Lunes*, p. 123.

⁶*Rev. des deux mondes*, xxxiii, 220.

CHAPTER XV.

LITERATURE.

The present chapter, as easily the most significant in the doctrine, will naturally prove the longest in our presentation. Its subject-matter will be capable of less condensation and abridgement than has heretofore been possible. It will require many subdivisions,¹ many analytical discriminations, much dealing with closely related questions. Its content forms a chief preoccupation with our author and hence necessarily with ourselves. It is the vital link between his more general theory and his written application, the point of departure for the stylist and for his critics. We cannot scant what one of the four greatest of eighteenth century *littérateurs* has to say concerning literature.

1.

GENERAL VIEW—DEFINITION, VALUE AND QUALITIES.

And first the old puzzling question of conception, definition and limitation comes imperiously to the front. If in one place he uses the term very broadly as inclusive of "knowledge and the sciences,"² in another he is quick to make a distinction between literature and books.³ We may even see some glimmering of a discrimination between the Literature of Power and of Knowledge⁴—which presents itself to him partly as an opposition of imagination *vs.* analysis :

"Donner des images bien sensibles fait la force; donner des idées tirées des conceptions de l'âme fait la finesse."⁵

¹ Which will, of course, largely correspond with those elaborated under Art—Book II.

² *P. & F.*, I, 274. Cited *inf.*, p. 103.

³ "Les ouvrages qui ne sont point de génie ne prouvent que la mémoire ou la patience de l'auteur" (vii, 177).

⁴ For all this, cf. Introduction, *sup.*, p. 8.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 13.

But it is not for him so much a matter of art against information as of genius against everything else. Genius is the *sine qua non*; and art often spoils it. Such categorical statement is contained in the following interesting passage :

"Les auteurs s'usent toujours ; ils ont trois manières, comme les peintres : celle de leur maître, qui est celle du collège ; celle de leur génie, qui leur fait faire de bons ouvrages ; et celle de l'art, que l'on appelle dans les peintres manière."¹

Genius is then the salvation and the specific difference. It is distinct from *esprit*, incapable of imitation, identical with invention or creation.² By this is meant "total invention,"³ for Voltaire was a plagiarist in that he had to be shown one side of a thing, before fully seeing it himself.⁴ Genius⁵ is furthermore ordinarily *naïf*.

So much for the divine fire. Now as to what it should aim at, which are its qualities and its closer instruments, we detect a certain hesitation, the old hesitation between thought and sentiment. There would seem to be also a tendency to favor the insertion of that other known element of amusement, here however subordinated.⁶

His remark, *à propos* of Florus, that "ce qui fait ordinairement une grande pensée, c'est lorsqu'on dit une chose qui en fait voir un grand nombre d'autres,"⁷ has often been considered as giving the core of his literary ideal. Certainly the principle finds able exemplification both in his subsequent views on writing and in the *cachet* of his own style.⁸ The same preference seems indicated in his admiration of Montaigne as the man who thinks, against most authors who only write.⁹ The kind of thought proposed, as indeed demanded by his period and by the character of his mind¹⁰ is evidently "des idées tirées des conceptions de l'âme,"¹¹ or the general idea :

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 17.

² *P. & F.*, II, 52.

³ Cf. *sup.*, p. 51.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 60.

⁵ Entitled here a "grand esprit"—*P. & F.*, II, 124.

⁶ *E. g.*, the compliment to Duclos (VII, 368)—"Vous êtes agréable à lire et vous faites penser."

⁷ VII, 121.

⁸ Cf. *inf.*, p. 157 and p. 196.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 48.

¹⁰ With a certain reserve, cf. *sup.*, p. 10.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 14.

"Un des grands délices de l'esprit des hommes, c'est de faire des propositions générales."¹

But a restriction is at once suggested, and still more clearly do we see a slur in the statement—itself tolerably general—that there is nothing in the world on which a man "médiocrement moral ne puisse faire des spéculations."²

The cause of sentiment against generalized thought³ is prettily pleaded in connection with Boileau and a *mot* of Louis XII.⁴

"Un (*le*) roi de France ne venge pas les injures d'un (*du*) duc d'Orléans."

The first form is a reflection, which anybody might make ; the second is a sentiment, more striking because it could be uttered only by that particular king of France :—

"Il n'en faut point faire une pensée générale. Ce qui frappe d'admiration c'est lorsque la chose est dite par celui qui la sentait . . ."

For Boileau, of the corrupted heart, he possesses "un esprit qui ne sert pas assez bien le coeur."⁵

Literature is clearly addressed to the soul, a soul compounded of sensibility and imagination.⁶ Our moral authors are *outréés* in speaking to the pure reason. In modern times,

"Chacun travaille sur l'esprit, et peu sur le coeur ; c'est que nous sentons mieux les nouvelles connaissances que les nouvelles perfections que nous acquérons."⁷

So it is that with our corrupted manners, our loss of natural sentiments and household affections, a moving tragedy may seem laughable, low and "popular."⁸ Our ancestors could weep where we deride, not because their *esprit* was smaller, but because their hearts were better. For himself, he is glad that he can still be

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 124.

² *P. & F.*, II, 19.

³ Cf. *sup.*, p. 42.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 51.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 52.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 297. Nearly repeated, *P. & F.*, I, 222—"c'est des sens et de l'imagination qu'il s'agit dans les ouvrages d'esprit." Mysteries are sublime rather "pour la raison."

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 137.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 56-7.

touched by the *Inès* of La Motte and inspired for worthier living by the *Esope à la cour* of Boursault.¹

The part of imagination has just been mentioned as coëxpressive with that of sentiment. If omitted in his list of the qualities,² if the living in the imagining of phantom fears and pleasures is not recommendable,³ yet poetry without this faculty is *manquée*,⁴ and in images is there force.⁵ Characteristically enough, he esteems that it is "dans le monde" that we learn how to imagine. "On heurte tant de sujets dans les conversations que l'on imagine des choses."⁶

Whatever his striking scorn of certain *genres*,⁷ he has small doubt concerning the usefulness, value and importance of literature as a whole, whether considered as containing *ouvrages d'esprit* or purely as *belles-lettres*. We have heard him claim at least a general utility for the books of *pur esprit*.⁸ They teach us the art of writing in all its detail;⁹ without which many people fail, for fault of being able to render an idea.¹⁰ He declares—and it is a notable admission already for the eighteenth century—that "le corps des sciences tient tout entier aux belles-lettres." The sciences gain greatly when treated "d'une manière ingénieuse et délicate; c'est par là qu'on ôte la sécheresse, qu'on prévient la lassitude, et qu'on les met à la portée de tous les esprits." This he illustrates by the examples of Malebranche and Fontenelle.¹¹

In fugitive passages he avows his taste for *belles-lettres*,¹² his hope that such taste may become general,¹³ and dominant in the life of his friends.¹⁴ He takes up the cudgels indeed for lighter literature, maintaining that not everything is frivolous merely because it has no present utility, observing that "tout est lié et tout se tient."¹⁵ Again :

¹ *P. & F.*, I, 21. He still also uses the word 'sentiment,' as a sensationalist, for the "ébranlement" or "chatouillement" of the ends of fibres. "Cela suffit pour expliquer tout."—*P. & F.*, II, 477.

² Cf. *inf.*, p. 86. ³ I, 189, 453. ⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 15. ⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 13.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 11. ⁷ *E. g.*, Poetry. See *inf.*, p. 106.

⁸ Quoted *sup.*, p. 26.

⁹ Quoted *inf.*, p. 86.

¹⁰ VII, 81.

¹¹ VII, 81-2.

¹² VII, 1.

¹³ VII, 419.

¹⁴ VII, 451.

¹⁵ *P. & F.*, I, 277.

"Ce ne sont pas seulement les lectures sérieuses qui sont utiles, mais aussi les agréables, y ayant un temps où on a besoin d'un délassement honnête. . . Il est donc bon que l'on écrive sur tous les sujets et de tous les styles."¹

Yet in a historical survey which he takes of the subject,² he holds first that literature is more than an amusement. Its prosperity is linked with that of empires, as sign or cause. Europe is more powerful and concomitantly more enlightened than the rest of the world. In Europe, the states where letters are the most cultivated are the strongest.³ And for further specification—

"Si nous ne jetons les yeux que sur notre France, nous verrons les lettres naître ou s'ensevelir avec sa gloire, donner une lueur sombre sous Charlemagne, et puis s'éteindre ; reparaître sous François I^r et suivre l'éclat de notre monarchie. Et, si nous nous bornons au grand règne de Louis XIV, nous verrons que, le temps de ce règne où la prospérité fut plus grande, le succès des lettres le fut aussi."

So the arts rose and fell with the power of the Roman Empire ; and so the sciences flourished, in the empire of the caliphs, with the great family of Abbas. Among the Turks, their ignorance alone can equal their feebleness. By ignorance the kingdoms of Peru and Mexico perished. At which point, Montesquieu drifts into a defence of science. But returning shortly to the linking of letters and empires, he deems that the prosperity of each causes *per se* its fall—by reason of the pendulum tendency of things.⁴

This connection is broadly that of *milieu* and he elsewhere makes more definitely that point. Literature is at its best only in the beginning of monarchies, a later general corruption "affectant encore cette partie-là."⁵ Manners are a potent influence. It was partly because the French of old had different manners that they were more moved by tragedy.⁶ For a new drama, we need "une nouvelle langue, de nouvelles moeurs, de nouvelles circonstances," a new nation, in short, "qui mêle aux caractères des hommes ses propres moeurs."⁷ Inverting the relation, he has even the *Culturgeschichte* idea of studying the Chinese theatre to learn the "manners of the country."⁸ He will take the first viewpoint demanded by a recognition of *milieu*. To judge of Homer one

¹ *P. & F.*, I, 388.

² *P. & F.*, I, 274-5.

³ Cf. on Art, *sup.*, p. 25.

⁴ *P. & F.*, I, 278.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 28.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 57.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 20-1.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 35.

must live in the camp of the Greeks and not in a French army.¹ We must indeed find the old passions “sur un fonds nouveau,” before we can take pleasure in viewing the representation of the manners of a barbaric people.¹ But it is better to hear the vizier Acomat speak of his way of loving than a “Bajazet naturalisé françois.”²

He shows evidence of some cosmopolitanism and much tolerance. There is a Republic of Letters,³ and—

“Les honnêtes gens, les gens de lettres, sont de toutes les nations, et tous les honnêtes gens de toutes les nations sont leur compatriotes.”⁴

Accordingly, in a spirit of brotherhood, he will seek for the best in Chinese dramatists,⁵ and attributes to English authors generosity and a better knowledge of their own books than the French can have.⁶ He goes into the future, with this broad spirit, and sees the eyles—or the spirals—of productiveness:—

“Il viendra un peuple qui sera, à notre égard, ce que nous sommes à l'égard des Grecs et des Romains. . . . Les auteurs prendront dans la nature ce que nous y avons déjà pris, ou dans nos auteurs mêmes, et bientôt ils s'épuiseront comme nous nous sommes épuisés.”⁷

There is a great tolerance,⁸ too, especially for him, in the statement that we must not criticise poets for the faults of poetry, nor metaphysicians for the difficulties of metaphysics.⁹ The method is still to allow the *genre*. It is good to write on all subjects and in all styles.¹⁰ Furthermore :

“Je dirai qu'il y a plusieurs sources de beauté par rapport aux ouvrages d'esprit, qu'il faut bien distinguer, et qu'il ne faut point faire dépendre une pensée d'un genre de beauté lorsque elle dépend d'un autre.”¹¹

He would make three principal divisions in the kinds of subjects, consisting respectively in reasoning, depiction, or the expression of passion. In each of the three, the method and the style should

¹ *P. & F.*, I, 228.

² *P. & F.*, I, 229.

³ Cf. *inf.*, p. 101.

⁴ VII, 448.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 34–5.

⁶ VII, 442.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 20. Cf. my note on classicism, *sup.*, p. 49.

⁸ Cf. *sup.*, p. 10.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 27.

¹⁰ Quoted *sup.*, p. 84.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 42.

vary.¹ He evinces then the same catholicity for kinds that he has shown in regard to nations.

Proceeding to strain the qualities of good writing, we have seen that he demands both thought and sentiment. He praises Bonnet's book, because "vous nous menez d'observation en observation."² The two great desiderata are, we gather, "cette force de génie qui saisit tout un sujet" and "cette perspicacité géométrique qui le pénètre."³ The more specific qualities in presentation, are thus listed:

"Nous apprenons dans les livres de pur esprit l'art d'écrire, l'art de rendre nos idées, de les exprimer noblement, vivement, avec force, avec grâce, avec ordre et avec cette variété qui délassé l'esprit."⁴

Several of these are old friends.⁵ Other such are the sentiment of surprise, for which alone we ordinarily read;⁶ naïveté, which should mark genius and epigrams;⁷ curiosity, "principe du plaisir que l'on trouve dans les ouvrages d'esprit";⁸ suite, or a "chaîne secrète et en quelque façon inconnue," which may link personages or different subjects.⁹ And one may add his statement that the best writers, generous of these and other satisfactions, "sont ceux qui ont excité dans l'âme plus de sensations en même temps."¹⁰

Other points in general literary theory may be briefly mentioned. Montesquieu is no believer in gross fecundity, praising Fontenelle¹¹ and English writers¹² for abstinence in production. He has no points of sympathy with later theorists who declare the subject, in writing, to be of little or no importance. There are certain subjects—for example satires on women¹³—which are worthless, and a really excellent author, such as Horace, will not touch them. Events spring from the subject, in the case of

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 45.—"Les choses dont le sujet consiste dans le raisonnement ; celles dont le sujet consiste dans la peinture, comme est par exemple, la poésie en général ; celles, enfin dont le sujet consiste à exprimer l'agitation des passions."

² VII, 425.

³ VII, 30.

⁴ VII, 81.

⁵ Cf., under Art, *sup.*, p. 35. ⁶ VII, 129.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 22.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 122.

⁹ I, 47-8.

¹⁰ VII, 130.

¹¹ VII, 445.

¹² *P. & F.*, II, 18.

¹³ *P. & F.*, II, 52.

Homer.¹ "Il faut toujours prendre un bon sujet ;" good things are wasted on a poor subject.²

For literary 'psychology,' something has already been said.³ He may be approaching the notion in his consideration of that *finesse*, which is "to give ideas drawn from the conceptions of the soul."⁴ He approaches it more nearly in holding that, since the great dramatists have exhausted the great types, "il ne nous reste plus que les caractères fins, ceux qui échappent aux esprits de commun."⁵ Character-drawing indeed he considers largely a matter of types, of generalizing so far as may be possible. Even a La Bruyère "doit toujours faire des tableaux, et non pas des portraits ; peindre des hommes, et non pas un homme"⁶—at least not an actual man. The thing presents itself to our author rather as a question of loosely grouping like characters, of finding a greatest common denominator, than as the finer process of taking the obtained type and deducing therefrom, differentiating, exhibiting the peculiar individual. The remark that a Turk must see, think and speak as a Turk, not as a Christian,⁷ may partly protect the *Lettres persanes*, may even indicate a desired objectivity in portraiture, but hardly gives prevision of the niceties of detailed and specialized delineation.⁸

2.

RELATIONS—THE INFLUENCE OF THE *SALON* AND
WOMAN—*ESPRIT.*

In speaking of the epistolary style, Montesquieu remarks that it passed from the hands of pedants with Voiture who added *finesse* and a certain affectation "qui se trouve toujours dans le passage de la pédanterie à l'air et au ton du monde."⁹ The recognition that literature had, so to speak, changed its base, finds a fuller expression in his reflections on reading Ronsard :

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 36.

² *P. & F.*, II, 10; cf. VII, 390. But just above (p. 84) he has admitted 'all subjects.'

³ Cf. *sup.*, p. 28.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 14.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 21.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 24–5.

⁷ I, 48.

⁸ Cf., under Application, *inf.*, p. 190.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 49.

"Du temps de Francois I^{er}, c'était les savants qui faisaient la réputation des auteurs ; aujourd'hui, ce sont les femmes. Ronsard est la preuve de ceci. On ne peut plus le lire, quoique personne n'ait eu plus de réputation."¹

It would be desirable for *savants*, if in writing they could learn this "jargon des femmes." But they know all languages except that.²

The talent which pleases women most, that of "badinage dans l'esprit," has passed from the *toilette* to all fields, and now well-nigh seems to form the general character of the nation.³ By the use of this, of *esprit*⁴ above all, of freedom in manners, progression in grace;⁵ by the flowering of imagination "dans le monde,"⁶ by imaginative cravings in fair hearers for *sottises* ;⁷ especially by feminine taste, which finds specialism and high intelligence ridiculous, and forces all into the consideration only of general objects :⁸ thereby have women won to-day their empire over the thoughts and language of men as found in books.⁹

The transition from this influence to that of conversation is easy. "Plaire dans une conversation vaine et frivole est aujourd'hui le seul mérite."¹⁰ For the most talkative nation is that where women give the tone,¹¹ and surely the French are talkative.¹² We flee—even to *ouvrages d'esprit*!—from insipid and languishing conversations.¹³ Montesquieu considers them ordinarily as good for others ; he would rather approve than listen ; he is pleased to find a man who will take pains to shine, for such a one is then exposed.¹⁴ Yet, to analyze the matter, we are wearied if conversations become uniform, if lazy people let everything fall.¹⁵ For harmony's sake, "il ne faut pas se croiser sans cesse . . . il faut marcher ensemble."¹⁶ Conversation is "un ouvrage que l'on construit," there must be no disarrangements, no disagreeableness,

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 31.

² *P. & F.*, II, 156.

³ I, 216.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 146, 150.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 150.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 10.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 147.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 33.

⁹ II, 382. His development of this is more in actual living and in practice than in precept. Cf. under Application, *inf.*, p. 186 ; and for his relations with Mmes. Geoffrin, Tencin, du Deffand *et al.*, cf. *Lettres, passim* ; Vian, 192-6, 273-4.

¹⁰ VII, 178.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 157.

¹² Barckhausen ed., *L. P.*, p. 295.

¹³ VII, 129.

¹⁴ VII, 152.

¹⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 133.

¹⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 302.

no demolishing spirits, who go off on side-issues and plague with minutiae and hinder everything.

Talking, in turn, is naturally associated with *esprit*, and he thus expounds the relation¹—

“L'esprit de conversation est ce qu'on appelle de l'*esprit* parmi les Français. Il consiste à (*sic*) un dialogue ordinairement gai, dans lequel chacun, sans s'écouter beaucoup, parle et répond, et où tout se traite d'une manière coupée, prompte et vive. Le style et le ton de la conversation s'apprennent, c'est-à-dire le style de dialogue. Il y a des nations où l'*esprit* de conversation est entièrement inconnu... .”

“Ce qu'on appelle *esprit* chez les Français n'est donc pas de l'*esprit*, mais un genre particulier d'*esprit*. L'*esprit*, en lui-même, est le bon sens joint à la lumière.”²

Again, the *esprit* of conversation is an “*esprit* particulier, qui consiste dans des raisonnements et des déraisonnements courts.”³ The quality is closely linked with literature, since the fury of Frenchmen is to have *esprit*, “et la fureur de ceux qui veulent avoir de l'*esprit* c'est de faire des livres.”⁴

He further distinguishes between the greater and the lesser variety, intelligence and wit. The first *esprit* includes several kinds, such as genius, good sense and taste, and consists broadly in having “les organes bien constitués, relativement aux choses où il s'applique.”⁵ There are the two classes of men, those who think and those who amuse themselves.⁶ There is the difference between saying a truth and a *bon mot*.⁷ There is a clear distinction, in fine, between “un homme d'*esprit* et un bel esprit.”⁸ And, with particular reference to Voltaire :

“Le bon esprit vaut mieux que le bel esprit.”⁹

It is the second specialized sense of the word with which we are concerned, which was indeed with Montesquieu a subject of perennial interest and almost a continual preoccupation. He is

¹ In continuance of the disquisition just given.

² *P. & F.*, II, 302-3.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 11.

⁴ I, 223.

⁵ VII, 119.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 124. Cf. *sup.*, p. 22, where the reflexive pronoun is omitted.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 13.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 126.

⁹ VII, 419. He esteems the *esprit* of that writer as “un vice de plus.”—*P. & F.*, II, 50.

perpetually judging people by their possession or lack of this quality.¹ That is the first thing which it instinctively occurs to him to say. On the occasion of Chesterfield's practical joke, Montesquieu is said to have been arguing the superiority of the French *esprit*.² It is a principal attribute of modern times.³

Yet formally he has much to plead against any wholesale admiration of this treacherous gift.

It should not be too much intermixed with irony⁴ or vinegar;⁵ it is often disdainful in excess,⁶ and has little relation to real genius;⁷ abandonment to it is dangerous;⁸ "les petits beaux-esprits" meet with his condemnation.⁹ Nor can he altogether approve such allied forms of wit as repartee, raillery and licentiousness.

The first is a product, not of judgment, but only of vivacity;¹⁰ badinage, however universal, is but a vain and frivolous thing.¹¹ The second is "un discours en faveur de son esprit contre son bon naturel."¹² We rail at everything, "parce que tout a un revers."¹³ But thin partitions do the bounds divide between a *railleur de profession* and a fool or an impertinent.¹⁴ There are rules for raillery; to wit, that it should touch on slight points, and should never be continuous or too personal:

"Enfin, il faut avoir pour but de faire rire celui qu'on raille, et non pas un tiers."

Thus he takes his stand by the celebrated definition of humor. For the Frenchman, genuine wit will find its justification only in its tact and its timeliness. *Saillies* three-fourths of the time, are *hors de saison*.¹⁵ The ridiculous, defined as "une chose qui ne s'accorde pas aux manières et aux actions ordinaires de la vie,"¹⁶ is, like *esprit* itself, for its pleasing effect,¹⁷ entirely a relative matter:

¹ VII, 225-6, 246, etc.

² See Besenval, *Mém.* I, 133-5. ³ *P. & F.*, II, 127.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 14.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 17. ⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 27, cf. *ibid.*, 111.

⁷ *P. & F.*, I, 225; *P. & F.*, II, 52.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 46.

⁹ VII, 154.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 125.

¹¹ VII, 178.

¹² *P. & F.*, II, 100.

¹³ *P. & F.*, II, 303.

¹⁴ *P. & F.*, I, 409.

¹⁵ *Mél. in.*, 136.

¹⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 134.

¹⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 126.

"Il est ais  de sentir en g n ral ce qui est ridicule ; mais on a le tact fin lorsqu'on sent ce qui est ridicule *l *, c'est- -dire devant chaque soci t  et devant chaque personne."¹

The value of *esprit*, in the long run, lies in its sympathetic appeal—"que cet esprit s'allie avec les autres esprits."² This may be his *humour*, which he finally calls the "passion de l'esprit."³ The French are wrong in confusing what the English variously term "wit, humour, sense, understanding."⁴ This humor, so distinct from *esprit*,⁵ is also distinct from *plaisanterie*—

"C'est plut t le plaisant de la plaisanterie. Ce n'est point la force comique, le *ris comica* ; c'est plut t la mani re de la force comique. Je la d finirai, dans la plaisanterie, la mani re de rendre plaisamment les choses plaisantes, et c'est le sublime de l'humour . . . ce que les images sont dans la po sie, l'humour est dans la plaisanterie."⁶

He allows then kindly humor. He allows too that gaiety which charges itself with the public joy.⁷

As to the salacious wit, it is a thing which theoretically he rejects. "Je n'aime pas les bons mots grivois."⁸ Whatever cannot be said before women is "bas et obsc ne."⁹ In detail, he admits that if a censorship on such a basis were made very rigid, the ancients would come to us much mutilated . . . as also the moderns.¹⁰ All the same, he would recommend such writers as Marivaux, of "admirables moeurs ;"¹¹ he can take no joy in the frank Rabelais ;¹² and at Paphos he distinguishes between gallantry and grossness, ruling out the books of the latter class.¹³ He would defend the *Temple de Gnide*¹⁴ on the ground that, dangerous as it may be, it has only the fault of its whole class of *romans*, which are dangerous doubtless, but not more so than other things. True, it is vicious to put licentious things into poetry. "Mais ordonner de n'avoir pas de sentiments   un  tre toujours sensible ; vouloir bannir les passions sans souffrir m me qu'on les justifie"—is to take too high and speculative ground, in a century which is very bad and is growing worse.

¹P. & F., II, 129.

²P. & F., I, 215; cf. *inf.*, under Authors, p. 97.

³P. & F., II, 125.

⁴ His English, P. & F., II, 8.

⁵P. & F., II, 14.

⁶P. & F., II, 15.

⁷P. & F., II, 303.

⁸P. & F., I, 17.

⁹P. & F., II, 303.

¹⁰P. & F., II, 29.

¹¹P. & F., II, 61.

¹²P. & F., II, 47.

¹³VII, 468.

¹⁴P. & F., I, 34-5.

To return, the characteristics of *esprit* in general are partly his old notions of *naïveté*¹ and relativity.² Its possession is a thing difficult to establish, particularly for women. The real quality does not seek to display itself, though “on n'est jamais bel-esprit³ quand on ne prétend pas de l'être.” Those who try too hard fall and become *sots*.⁴ “Quand on court après l'esprit, on attrape la sottise.”⁵ In the opinion of the *gens du monde*, “l'esprit consiste à rapprocher les idées les plus éloignées.”⁶

Here may well find place the amusing skit⁷ on the wit without honor, who agreed with his friend that they should mutually set off each others sallies. “Travaillons de concert à nous donner de l'esprit.” By careful study and preparation, by admiring and supporting each other in public, they should finally be able to keep up a running fire of *bons mots* for an hour and reach the Academy at last :—

“Tu verras que nous donnerons le ton à toutes les conversations, et qu'on admirera la vivacité de notre esprit, et le bonheur de nos reparties. . . Tu brilleras aujourd'hui, demain tu seras mon second. . . Tu seras homme d'esprit malgré que tu en aies.”

For his own *esprit*, Montesquieu does not care to shine,⁸ nor is he touched by the reputation of fine wit.⁹ He never tried to appear such. In the world, he says, he was announced as an *homme d'esprit*, and perhaps proved the accusation by the *Lettres persanes*—none too happily for his peace of mind. “Dans les occasions, mon esprit, comme s'il avait fait un effort, s'en tirait assez bien.”¹⁰ After which, he proceeds to quote a number of his *bons mots*.¹¹ Indeed we feel that many of the foregoing remarks on the subject are offered somewhat as samples of his own proficiency.

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 124.

² *P. & F.*, II, 126.

³ The distinction is in the *bel*.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 127.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 128.

⁶ *Mél. in.*, 136.

⁷ *L. P.*, I, 191–4.

⁸ “J'aime les maisons où je puis me tirer d'affaire avec mon esprit de tous les jours,” VII, 152.

⁹ VII, 154.

¹⁰ VII, 156.

¹¹ Also *P. & F.*, *passim*.

3.

BOOKS AND AUTHORS.

It is doubtful if any author of renown has passed so sweeping a condemnation upon books and their producers as has Montesquieu in some dozen pages of the *Lettres persanes*.¹ For several days he sends his mouthpiece, Rica, to visit a library—a vast and discouraging mass known not even to its keeper—and each day we have the sarcastic demolition of a new *genre*, history alone escaping the fire. Further on, in the same volume,² he contemptuously prescribes various books, from Aristotle to the newest novels, as medicinal doses, purgatives, vomitives and the like.

His opinion elsewhere is no less categorically expressed. “A quoi bon,” cries the fertile President, “à quoi bon faire des livres pour cette petite terre?”³ In most books, where size is the chief object, we are half-drowned in a sea of words, and amplification is the reader’s ruin.⁴ Usbek himself could do as well, if he cared to ruin his health and the bookstores. Our productions serve only to immortalize our *sottises*, which otherwise would die with us.⁵ Such expressions may well be assigned to the hyperbolical side of the Gascon, but he loses his jocoseness in stating that—

“la plus mauvaise copie de l’homme est celle qui se trouve dans les livres, qui sont un amas de propositions générales, presque toujours fausses.”⁶

Among which falsities there might be instanced his, that books always show men as better than they are.⁷

Yet he distinguishes clearly enough between good and bad books, as we have seen him distinguish between books and literature :—

“Les ouvrages qui ne sont point de génie ne prouvent que la mémoire ou la patience de l’auteur.”⁸

Books are a kind of society, and according as one chooses good or poor company, so he improves or wastes his time.⁹ There are also

¹ I, 414-27. The detail of this will be presented later under the different forms.

² I, 456-7. ³ VII, 172. ⁴ I, 342. ⁵ I, 223.

⁶ P. & F., I, 281. But cf. *sup.*, p. 82. ⁷ VII, 174. ⁸ VII, 177.

⁹ *Mél. in.*, 143.

the most dangerous class, the “ouvrages communs,” which are tiresome—“les mauvais, on ne les compte pas.”¹ He has read²—or will read³—only the best books. The chief merit of new works is that by them one may judge the public which reads them.³ Again :—

“ Il me semble que, jusqu’à ce qu’un homme ait lu tous les livres anciens, il n’a aucune raison de leur préférer les nouveaux.”⁴

It is fortunate, at any rate, that not all works are laborious, and some spring, like Pallas, painlessly from the head of Jupiter.⁵

Among the kinds of books which he especially despises are imitations, commentaries, compilations, translations, etc. The great original work, wherein the author has not lowered himself to the quality of a copyist,⁶ is the only thing worth while. Such a work usually causes the construction of five or six hundred others, “ces derniers se servant du premier à peu près comme les géomètres se servent de leurs formules.”⁷ As a result of imitation, the literary jealousy may arise;—“On s’efforce à imiter ceux qui ont su plaire ; l’imitation ne réussit pas, l’amour-propre s’en offense.”⁸ Parody, in particular, is the refuge of mediocre minds.⁹

It is, however, true that imitation has been known among the best authors. As Tasso imitated Virgil, so Virgil imitated Homer, and Homer probably some one else.¹⁰ It does not take a very strong mind to make the accusation of plagiarism.¹¹ According to small souls, there are no more original authors; Descartes drew all of his philosophy from the ancients; Euclid, Horace or Theocritus have said it all. In derision of which, Montesquieu proposes :

“ Je m’engage de trouver dans Cardan les pensées de quelque auteur que ce soit, même le moins subtil.”

Collections, *recueils*, are not infrequently detestable.¹² Compilers meet with his highest scorn, those people who gather patches from

¹*P. & F.*, II, 18. ²VII, 163. ³*P. & F.*, I, 33. ⁴I, 343.

⁵VII, 23, cf. *sup.*, p. 43. ⁶*P. & F.*, II, 11. ⁷*P. & F.*, II, 17. ⁸VII, 478.

⁹*P. & F.*, I, 277. ¹⁰*P. & F.*, II, 35. ¹¹*P. & F.*, II, 11. ¹²*P. & F.*, II, 65.

others to paste in their own works.¹ “Je voudrais qu'on respectât les livres originaux.” It seems profanation to draw good things from their sanctuary to expose them to an unmerited *mépris* by reason of their association.

He speaks of the “armée effroyable de glossateurs, de commen-tateurs, de compilateurs,” weak in intelligence as they are strong in numbers ;² of these same grammarians, glossers and commen-tators, who can fortunately dispense with the use of *bon sens*.³ The commentators, indeed, have a special place in Rica's iconoclastic review. They seek in Scripture not what should be believed, but what they want to believe.⁴ Hence they corrupt meanings and twist passages, making the Bible like a battle-field. They augment or abridge their authors at will.⁵ A man like Coste comes to believe that he has made Montaigne, and blushes with pleasure when the essayist is praised.⁶

Dictionaries, too, for living languages at least, are bad and restricted things.⁷ The Academy itself has produced or caused “*satires néologiques*.” The Academy dictionary he humorously calls almost old when it was born ;⁸ “un bâtard,⁹ qui avait déjà paru, l'avait presque étouffé dans sa naissance.”

Translations are railed at by the geometer of the *Lettres persanes*.¹⁰ He cannot understand that a man may put twenty years on a translation of Horace, twenty years without original thought, a life-time of merely speaking for others. The *savant* who is attacked objects that he renders a great service to the public in familiarising good authors. The other returns that he also esteems “les sublimes génies que vous travestissez,” but the translator is quite unlike them—he may translate them, but no one will ever translate him. In general :

“Les traductions sont comme ces monnaies de cuivre qui ont bien la même valeur qu'une pièce d'or, et même sont d'un plus grand usage pour le peuple ; mais elles sont toujours faibles et d'un mauvais aloi.”

¹I, 323-4.

²I, 319.

³I, 419.

⁴I, 416-7.

⁵P. & F., II, 19.

⁶P. & F., II, 62. A commentator is called “barbare,” I, 53.

⁷P. & F., II, 8.

⁸I, 247.

⁹That of Furetière.

¹⁰I, 398.

In resurrecting the illustrious dead, the *savant* gives them a body without life, without spirit.

But Montesquieu himself, while doubtful as to just what a translation should aim at, is inclined to admit various efforts. He finds fire and charm in the *La Valterie Odyssey*.¹ Its inexactness does not disturb him, since he considers it better to remove the “gêne littéraire” and restore to Homer that agreeableness which he certainly had in the Greek, by a free use of the French spirit and expressions. The translator of the *Esprit des Lois*² is praised for his fidelity, but more particularly for his endeavors to render the spirit :

“Il semble que vous ayez voulu traduire aussi mon style, et vous y avez mis cette ressemblance : *qualem decet esse sororum.*”³

This preference of the ethos *versus* literalness is hardly supported by his claim for the *Temple de Gnide*,⁴ that he has been faithful to his (fictitious) Greek original :⁵

“J’ai cru que les beautés qui n’étaient point dans mon auteur, n’étaient point des beautés ; et j’ai souvent quitté l’expression la moins vive,⁶ pour prendre celle qui rendait mieux sa pensée.”

As to the difficulty of translating, one must first know Latin well and then forget it.⁷ There should be no enfeebling of the original, “chose que les auteurs font quelquefois, parce qu’ils estiment trop leur original.”⁸ To keep the Bible “mâle et forte,” its rendering should be free from modern affectations and delicacies.⁹ Its original character, its antique flavor, its poetic style should all be kept, without resort to popular expressions on the one hand, nor to mere fine language on the other. With this excellent advice we may leave the subject.

The author, in himself, and in relation to his works, also comes in for discussion. “D’abord les ouvrages donnent de la réputation à l’ouvrier, et ensuite l’ouvrier aux ouvrages.”¹⁰ When an

¹P. & F., II, 37.

²Thomas Nugent.

³VII, 353.

⁴What he says in connection with this, however, is neither very serious nor very sincere.

⁵II, 10.

⁶Other reading—“qui n’était pas la meilleure.”

⁷P. & F., II, 8.

⁸VII, 434.

⁹VII, 346-8.

¹⁰VII, 174.

author has become famous, he should be more careful than others, for nothing retards more the progress of knowledge than a bad work by a celebrated author.¹ Those who wrote first² had the advantage of fresh fields, unexhausted mines and great untried undertakings;³ they were also more admired, because for a time they were the superiors of those who read them.⁴

The author, as a personage, has his prejudices, his peculiarities and his glaring faults. In a curious chapter, "Des Législateurs,"⁵ Montesquieu passes in review such names as Aristotle, Plato, Macchiavelli and More, and finds a prejudice, the personal equation, directing the work of each.⁶ A similar *ressort*, mingled with vanity, causes authors to delight in their own writings:⁷

"Ce que nous avons mis dans nos ouvrages tient à toutes nos autres idées et se rapporte à des choses qui nous ont plu, puisque nous les avons apprises."⁸

But after a time our masterpieces charm us less, since they are no longer so closely linked to our manner of thinking.

Amour-propre, also a reason for our liking our works, further impels an author to represent men as better than they are, that he may be believed better than he is.⁹ "Enfin les auteurs sont des personnages de théâtre." He would recommend to them modesty and a consideration rather for the *amour-propre* of their readers; "cherchons à nous faire aimer, si nous voulons nous faire lire."¹⁰ Authors who would take a beating without complaint are yet unable to stand the least criticism of their productions.¹¹

For all this, for all their vanity and pettiness, however small the souls that one may occasionally find among men of letters,¹² he will certainly call them in the gross *honnêtes gens*.¹³ Pedigree does not matter in their case¹⁴—which, from the President, is worth noting¹⁵—and on *mont Parnasse* all positions from foot-hills

¹ v, 452.

² Especially dramatists—cited *sup.* p. 87.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 20-1.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 29.

⁵ v, 414.

⁶ Cf. the "retour secret," *sup.* p. 53.

⁷ "Un auteur peut dire que nul n'aura plus de plaisir à lire son livre que lui en a eu à le faire"—*P. & F.*, II, 156.

⁸ *Mél. in.*, 146.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 100.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, I, 215.

¹¹ I, 342.

¹² VII, 451.

¹³ VII, 448.

¹⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 40.—He says ironically, "J'ai toujours eu mauvaise opinion d'Horace, parce qu'il était fils d'un affranchi."

¹⁵ Cf. *sup.*, p. 11, note 5.

to summit are honorable.¹ From the beginning of time it has been a characteristic of authors to declaim against the injustice of their age.² Horace and Aristotle were already praising their ancestors and condemning themselves,³ the courtiers of Nero or of Augustus kept up the cry, and according to the race of writers, men at present ought to be bears. Only in his own fortunate time—and incidentally in a *Discours Académique*, where the great Louis must be duly flattered⁴—could Montesquieu call such a reproach reasonless. He assigns as cause for this general lamentation of authors the fact that we are accustomed to consider our fathers and masters in a corrective and hence in a more worshipful attitude.⁵ What he might have assigned as a more potent and practical reason is the fact of the reciprocal small esteem that most ages have had for their authors. At any rate, he dwells sufficiently upon the rough roads which men of letters usually travel.⁶ Labor which is often useless; despair and lassitude; emulation akin to jealousy; long meditations and vigils and *sueurs*—“vous reconnaissiez là, messieurs, la vie des gens de lettres.”⁷ For them, no place is a place of tranquility—

“Nous n’acquérons par nos travaux que le droit de travailler davantage. Il n’y a que les dieux qui aient le privilège de se reposer sur le Parnasse.”

Not only must an author endure all insults, all inquietudes, but when his work finally appears, quarrels and wars pile upon him.⁸ He can obtain esteem only from those in his own field, if from them. “Enfin, il faut joindre, à une réputation équivoque, la privation des plaisirs et la perte de la santé.”

It would seem by this that the President is surely of the *métier*, and of himself as an author he also speaks—“J’ai la maladie de faire des livres et d’en être honteux quand je les ai faits.”⁹ An interesting passage in the *Histoire Véritable*,¹⁰ paralleled in other

¹ VII, 256.

² VII, 26.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 203.

⁴ VII, 26.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 203.

⁶ Their condition, be it remembered, was already improving in his time.

⁷ VII, 6.

⁸ I, 464–5.

⁹ VII, 156.

¹⁰ Ed. Fortage, pp. 56–7.

places,¹ tells of the trouble through which he passed in regard to the *Lettres persanes*. The book had more success than its author. Envy worked against him, and far more was expected of him than formerly. Many fled from him, because they claimed he was a *bel esprit* and affected :—

“Enfin, ce malheureux ouvrage me tourmenta toute ma vie, et, soit qu'on le louât, soit qu'on le blamât, j'en fus toujours embarrassé.”

He shows, however, some degree of pride in his professional standing. He says with complacency that he is known on “mont Parnasse,”² he feels that he has gained “quelque espèce d’honneur,”³ he hints with complacency at praise,⁴ and even manifests some humor when his manuscript is slighted.⁵ It is worth noting that he considers it an important result of his literary fame that his wine sells well in England.⁶

4.

SCHOLARSHIP AND COGNATE FIELDS.

Concerning study and scholarship, institutions and Academies, science, philosophy and journalism, our author also freely expresses views which may receive a compendious exposition.

“Aimer à lire,” he says roundly, “c'est faire un échange des heures d'ennui que l'on doit avoir en sa vie, contre des heures délicieuses ;”⁷ study has been for him the sovereign remedy against the troubles of life ;⁸ those who have studied in their youth need in their old age only to remember and not to learn ;⁹ “ceux qui aiment à s'instruire ne sont jamais oisifs ;”¹⁰ but labor must be continuous, for the less we work, the less power we have to work.¹¹ He adduces weighty arguments for the pleasure and

¹The “j'ai la maladie,” etc., probably applies to the *L. P.* Cf., also, VII, 153.—“J'essuyai mille dégoûts.”

²VII, 251.

³VII, 413.

⁴VII, 363.

⁵VII, 289.

⁶VII, 403. For Montesquieu and his critics, cf. *inf.*, p. 122; and for these opinions as connected with his rank as an artist, see later under Application, p. 202.

⁷VII, 169.

⁸VII, 151.

⁹VII, 176.

¹⁰I, 170,

¹¹VII, 433.

profit of study. Aside from the satisfaction of intellectual conquest and the appeasing of curiosity, there is the fact that the love of study is almost the only lasting passion.¹ Old age without the benefit of such a love is a terrible *ennui*, and with it may still triumph over youth. “Il faut se faire un bonheur qui nous suive dans tous les âges.” The utility of scholarship is, moreover, social and practical as well.²

But he fully recognizes that not all the forms of scholarship are wise or profitable. He is opposed to the predominance of authority in matters of pure reasoning.³ Scholarship, in many of its manifestations, shows as the reverse of genius.⁴ It is a pity that *justement* in reading, where our soul puts out all its force, it should be compelled to follow others’ ideas—ideas childish and frivolous—exactly what we are seeking to escape.⁵ It is bad and benighting to ridicule *savants* ;⁶ but their powerlessness of adaptation often exposes them to scorn :

“Ils sont gauches quand ils veulent être frivoles, et sots quand ils veulent raisonner avec des machines qui n’ont jamais fait que sentir.”⁷

He cannot esteem these *savants*, whose knowledge has no connection with their soul, “et qui annoncent la sagesse des autres sans être sages eux-mêmes.”⁸ When scholars degenerate into pedants, he little likes their style of writing ;⁹ and he congratulates himself that there is no nation less pedantic than the French.¹⁰ The blind passion of a manuscript hunter,¹¹ the excessive care for minutiae and details,¹² the empty subtleties of dialecticians¹³ he finds ridiculous and openly mocks.

With the hard conditions of scholars, however, as with that of writers,¹⁴ he is disposed to sympathize. They are not appreciated to-day, now that the *salon* influence is supreme ;¹⁵ an ungrateful country, which employs the fruits of their labors, yet dares call

¹ VII, 79–80.

² He extols the importance of method (VII, 179), and makes the modern recommendation of extreme care in the use of sources (*P. & F.*, II, 46).

³ *P. & F.*, II, 22, cf. *sup.*, p. 53.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 252.

⁵ *P. & F.*, I, 157.

⁶ VII, 2. ⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 156.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 157.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 49.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 176.

¹¹ I, 447.

¹² I, 334.

¹³ I, 142 ; *P. & F.*, II, 23.

¹⁴ Cf. *sup.*, p. 98.

¹⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 31.

them useless.¹ There is an imaginary letter from a *savant* in the *Lettres persanes*, giving in a semi-serious way, the hardships of his lot.² In general, such men have to suffer poverty, privations and persecutions, sustained only by *droiture dans le cœur* and the persistent thirst for learning.

He continues his remonstrance against set authority by stigmatising as dangerous the project of the *Journaux de Trévoux* “de se rendre maîtres de la littérature ;”³ by declaring that there is room for all in the Republic of Letters.⁴ As to institutions, *demi-collèges* are no help to knowledge, estranging as they do the sons of *bourgeois* from their true estate, without giving them the other.⁵ The education of colleges in general is *basse*, bigoted, damaging to the intelligence and to the heart. The Sorbonne, which held him under its censure for a time,⁶ provokes a *bon mot* :

“Cette Sorbonne est la mouche du coche ; elle croit qu’elle fait remuer tout.”⁷

It is particularly the Academy which he attacks, as French men of letters usually attack that institution until they are admitted to its doors. Vian has remarked⁸ that at the time of Montesquieu’s second candidacy,⁹ the Academy was composed largely of churchmen and lords with “quelques gens de lettres.”¹⁰ This illustrious body had refused him admission two years before, mainly on account of his epigrams against them in the *Lettres persanes*. Such action hardly tended to diminish the epigrams :

“Ce corps à quarante têtes, toutes remplies de figures, de métaphores et d’antithèses. Tant de bouches ne parlent presque que par exclamation ; ses oreilles veulent toujours être frappées par la cadence et l’harmonie.”

It is never constant, was formerly greedy and is always bizarre. They have the fury of the panegyric—“l’éloge va se placer, comme de lui-même, dans leur babil éternel.”¹¹ The Academy will never fall ; as long as there will be fools there will be also *beaux-esprits*.¹²

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 122.

² I, 462-4.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 63.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 27.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 308.

⁶ VII, 397, 402. Cf. *inf.*, p. 189.

⁷ VII, 422.

⁸ *Hist.*, p. 99.

⁹ In 1727.

¹⁰ About six.

¹¹ I, 247-8.

¹² *P. & F.*, II, 127.

After his election, it is without surprise that we hear him declare that such institutions are made to promote amity, "une alliance entre les gens de lettres, et pour être comme le temple de la paix."¹ The Academy gave us the finest model of the critical *genre* in its *Critique sur le Cid*.² Our author's *Discours de Réception*³ may itself be esteemed a fine model of tergiversation—"just for a riband to stick in his coat." He harangues the brotherhood to the effect that they are inspired with the love of righteous men, and with the hate of genius unadorned by virtue; that they are established to render worship unto Louis XIV, Richelieu and Séguier; that he is happy in being elevated, associated to such masters in the art of various eulogy; and he proceeds to do his best for his predecessor.

He is equally solicitous concerning other Academies. He sought to join the Academy of Stanislas at Nancy, and was much pleased when elected.⁴ It is to be remarked that the best of his commendation for literature⁵ is taken from a *Discours* to that very Academy of Bordeaux whose activities he turned from *belles-lettres* to science:

"Il regardait les sociétés de bel esprit, si étrangement multipliés dans nos provinces, comme une espèce, ou plutôt comme une ombre de luxe littéraire, qui nuit à l'opulence réelle, sans même en offrir l'apparence."⁶

His early taste for science has been mentioned.⁷ He does not value at a high figure his scientific writings upon Natural History, the causes of echo, etc.:

"Il ne faut point chercher la réputation par ces sortes d'ouvrages, ils ne l'obtiennent ni ne la méritent; on profite des observations, mais on ne connaît pas l'observateur."⁸

Mere observation does not require much talent; a mediocre observer, incapable of constructing a system, may yet find a fact which will put even a Newton to the torture; but Newton will

¹ VII, 447.

² By Chapelain—*P. & F.*, II, 50.

³ VII, 91–5.

⁴ VII, 368–72.

⁵ Quoted *sup.*, p. 83.

⁶ d'Alembert, p. iv. Also cf. Auger, *Vie*, p. vii; Zévort, *Montesquieu*, p. 37; Vian, *Histoire*, pp. 43, 47.

⁷ Cf. *sup.*, p. 10.

⁸ VII, 53.

always be Newton, and the other “un homme commun, un vil artiste [sic], qui a vu une fois, et n'a peut-être jamais pensé.” The sciences are capable of division into those “qui sont uniquement du ressort de la mémoire,” and those for which genius is needed.¹ Again, he has stated the dependence of the whole body of sciences upon *belles-lettres*.² His use of the word ‘science,’ even in the Bordeaux Academy *Discours sur les motifs qui doivent nous encourager aux sciences*, is broad enough to include knowledge and scholarship in general, and has little more than a rhetorical opposition to the arts and literature.³

To pass for a moment to the other pole where literature touches life, our author can hardly be considered a fervent friend of journalism. The *journalistes*⁴ are wrong in praising only new books, and are insincere in their criticisms.⁵ The *nouvellistes*, who were the real purveyors of news in those times, the idle haunters of the Tuilleries, are useless, vain, frivolous and bitten with an abundant curiosity.⁶ They are always exaggerating their information; “ils ne sauraient consentir à ignorer quelque chose.” They are further marked by a mania for gratuitous prophecy, by truckling and chauvinism. They lack only modesty and good sense.

Other kinds of writing or discourse—not literature, though connected therewith—on which Montesquieu delivers himself, are philosophy, theology, jurisprudence and oratory. The first, he sees, is in a way the fountainhead of knowledge:

“La philosophie ne doit point être isolée ; elle a des rapports avec tout.”

He declares its value, singularly illustrating by saying that if the Mexicans had been Cartesians, Cortez could never have conquered them.⁷ But with this exception and another,⁸ he thinks little of the individual philosophers :

¹ VII, 85.

² VII, 81.

³ It is from this *Discours* that were drawn many of our citations on the value of literature and of study—cf. *sup.*, p. 83.

⁴ That is, book-reviewers.

⁵ I, 342–3.

⁶ I, 403–4.

⁷ *P. & F.*, I, 388–9. This is either a gasconade or a poor pun.

⁸ Malebranche—cf. *inf.*, p. 142.

"La philosophie des Grecs était très peu de chose. Ils ont gâté tout l'Univers : non seulement leurs contemporains, mais aussi leurs successeurs."¹

Their great error of not distinguishing between positive and relative qualities inundated all their knowledge. The Pythagoreans were pitiable and puerile, and too submissive to *Ipse dixit*. We have never gained much by taking over the jargon of Aristotle.² Plato, Cicero or Lucretius may be "beau." The sects of Epicureans and Stoics contributed mainly to the preparation for Christianity. In general, philosophy is an excellent soporific,³ and—

"C'est une chose extraordinaire que toute la philosophie consiste dans ces trois mots : Je m'en f . . ."⁴

The seductive sides of metaphysics are, first, that it suits for lazy people to study in bed, and, second, that it treats of great things and great interests, God, man, nature and the future.⁵ As to philosophy in the special eighteenth-century sense, he holds that it has won over the intelligence, but left the national character and manners.⁶

For ethical and theological books, our moral authors are *outréés* in speaking to the understanding and not to the soul;⁷ but a moral treatise as such would not shock even a prince.⁸ Works of this kind are much more useful than ascetic or devotional books.⁹ Those of theology are "doublement inintelligibles, et par la matière qui y est traitée, et par la manière de la traiter." Those of mystics, "des dévots qui ont le cœur tendre," contain ecstasies and *ravissements*, the warmth of the heart provoking that of the brain and resulting in "le délire de la dévotion." When, as in the case of Santa Theresa, the ecstasies are real and recounted by the person who has experienced them, they are easily pardonable; but there is no excuse for a cold and fictitious relation of "les plus grandes niaiseries du monde" by another party, as is the case of the *Vie de Marie Alacoque*.¹⁰

¹P. & F., II, 489-92. ²Cf. *inf.*, p. 134. ³P. & F., II, 300. ⁴P. & F., II, 483.

⁵P. & F., II, 475. Cf. I, 419, "les livres de métaphysique, qui traitent de si grands intérêts, et dans lesquels l'infini se rencontre partout."

⁶vii, 268.

⁷P. & F., II, 297.

⁸P. & F., II, 19.

⁹I, 417.

¹⁰P. & F., II, 527-8.

Casuists deal with secret, imaginative and seductive things;¹ they are derided in a *portrait* of the *Lettres persanes*,² as addicted to vain subtleties and as seeking to win heaven at the best bargain.

In short, theology, if it has not spoiled its victim, may pass him on to natural philosophy.³

With law-books, the *degagé* advocate of Letter LXVIII⁴ would readily dispense. Such monuments of a vain science are only in the way, since almost all cases are idiosyncratic and not to be found under any general rule. It is a question, not of knowledge, but of practical application in the courts. Montesquieu pays his compliments to procedure⁵ and legal chicanery in the fine *Discours prononcé à la rentrée du Parlement de Bordeaux*:⁶

“L'obscurité du fond a fait naître la forme. Les fourbes, qui ont espéré de pouvoir cacher leur malice s'en sont fait une espèce d'art.”⁷

He exhorts the advocates and the *procureurs* to be just, upright, merciful, considerate of their duty to the public.⁸ Among great legislators he ranks Puffendorf and Grotius. The first is the “Tacite d'Allemagne.”⁹ Both, as his precursors, receive a generous tribute :

“Je rends grâces à MM. Grotius et Puffendorf d'avoir exécuté ce qu'une grande partie de cet ouvrage¹⁰ demandait de moi, avec cette hauteur de génie à laquelle je n'aurais pu atteindre.”¹¹

Orators, “qui ont le talent de persuader indépendamment des raisons,”¹² yet prove in the long run less powerfully persuasive than those whom we really esteem.¹³ He does not think their sort very influential with the people :

“Le Peuple ne suit point les raisonnements des orateurs. Il peut être frappé par les images et par une éloquence qui a des mouvements; mais rien ne le détermine bien que les spectacles.”¹⁴

¹ I, 417.

² I, 201.

³ VII, 268.

⁴ I, 237-8.

⁵ “Quant à la procédure, je n'y entendais rien”—VII, 152.

⁶ In 1725.

⁷ VII, 56.

⁸ VII, 63-5.

⁹ *Voy.*, II, 202.

¹⁰ *E. L.*

¹¹ *P. & F.*, I, 100.

¹² I, 419.

¹³ *P. & F.*, II, 22.

¹⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 231.

What orators lack in profundity, they will give you in length;¹ and they magnify or diminish the importance of things to suit their purposes.²

To take oratory's special types, we have seen him criticize the Academy *éloge*;³ the *oraison funèbre* is likewise a deliverance of praise, “avec lequel on serait bien embarrassé de décider au juste du mérite du défunt.”⁴ Of sermons he has hardly a word to say, alluding simply to the old discourses of Maillard, Menot, Rollin and Barletta⁵ as seeming burlesques to-day, though sufficiently serious in their time.⁶

He makes frequent *rapprochement* between orators and poets. The former have ruined themselves in imitating the latter.⁷ The works of both are “ouvrages d'ostentation,”⁸ and have but a “general utility.”⁹ They are alike addicted to a wearisome uniformity, orators in periods, poets in measures and cadences.¹⁰

5.

GENRES—POETRY, FICTION, DRAMA, HISTORY, SATIRE AND CRITICISM.

Poetry, in itself, made little or no appeal to Montesquieu. What Ste-Beuve¹¹ has called an “exclamation mémorable”—the famous *dictum* that the four great poets are Plato, Malebranche, Shaftesbury and Montaigne¹²—shows well enough where lie our author's tastes. He will value principally the poetry of thought, of philosophy, with little regard for musical or sentimental elements.

He admits readily enough his own failures in this respect,¹³ and even when he addresses the Muses, he is careful to make a discrimination between their respective provinces :

“Divines Muses, je sens que vous m'inspirez, non pas ce qu'on chante à Tempé sur les chalumeaux, ou ce qu'on répète à Délos sur la lyre; vous voulez que je parle à la raison.”¹⁴

¹ VII, 171. ² *P. & F.*, II, 24. ³ I, 247—But cf. *sup.*, p. 102. ⁴ I, 153.

⁵ Fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. ⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 31–2. ⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 17.

⁸ V, 403; VII, 171. ⁹ VII, 81. ¹⁰ VII, 123.

¹¹ *C. de L.*, IV, 94. ¹² VII, 171. ¹³ VII, 199, 398. ¹⁴ IV, 360.

The subject receives much comment in the *Pensées et Fragments*, and poets furnish both a *portrait* and an important division of Rica's library talks, in the *Lettres persanes*. A poet, with his grimaces, his lack of good clothing and of *savoir-faire* is "le grotesque du genre humain" and the most ridiculous of men.¹ He may be born such, as he declares; he will certainly remain such all his life. So he is exposed to the full scorn of the public,² to poverty, and at best to the mercies of his patrons.³

In Rica's analysis,⁴ the poets are "ces auteurs dont le métier est de mettre des entraves au bon sens, et d'accabler la raison sous des agréments."⁵ For the several kinds, the epic is a type concerning which he knows very little; but *connaisseurs* say that there have never been but two,⁶ and that all the others are false epics. They say, moreover, that it is impossible to make new ones; "et cela est encore plus surprenant."⁷

The lyric he scorns as much as the others, considering that art "une harmonieuse extravagance." The idyll and eclogue give a pleasing sense of tranquility, in showing the condition of shepherds. The most dangerous class are the epigrammatists.⁸

The only species whom he is willing to admire are the dramatists,⁹ "qui, selon moi, sont les poètes par excellence, et les maîtres des passions," whether moving us gently in comedy, or, in tragedy, with violence and agitation.

But the Troglodytes are allowed epic and pastoral song as at any rate connected with simplicity and innocence.¹⁰ Poetry flourishes best in quiet places and the silence of the woods;¹¹ and perhaps it is hence that he allows singers to celebrate the *vie*

¹ I, 173.

² Even to the point of being beaten (I, 343).

³ In *E. L.*, M. dwells on the base uses of poetry, its association with rhetoric and flattery (v, 488).
⁴ I, 425-6.

⁵ Elsewhere (*P. & F.*, II, 507), M. makes the "délire des poètes" responsible for Paganism.

⁶ Probably the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*.

⁷ This is probably a sly hit at the *Henriade*, which was just in the writing (cf. *inf.*, p. 144). As to the artificial epic, he claims (*P. & F.*, II, 19) that fiction is such an integral part of the *genre* that the *Paradise Lost* could be admired in England only after religion had begun to assume a fictional value.

⁸ See *inf.*, p. 119.

⁹ Cf. *inf.*, p. 113 f.

¹⁰ I, 83.

¹¹ VII, 9.

champêtre and the late lamented Golden Age.¹ He would then naturally allow description and it has been seen that he considers poetry a literary division whose subject consists "dans la peinture."² Whether painting the effects of nature or of the passions, a flow of words here seems in order. The method may merge into that of narrating by effects, as when Ovid depicts the state of Lucrece and her abandonment to grief.³

The poetry of love receives only slight and unimpassioned mention in the *Voyage à Paphos*.⁴ The "titres galants" are there arranged on different shelves, with a preference for the ancients.⁵ They include a small number of authors, "qui se sont plus attachés aux sentiments qu'à l'esprit." But Montesquieu recognizes little high expression of this passion, and a certain poet who attempts to celebrate the pleasures of love with fatuity, *emphase* and exhaustion of his technical devices, is thus disposed of by Venus :

"Les Muses seront peut-être contentes de votre ouvrage ; mais je connais des plaisirs qu'Apollon même n'exprimera jamais."⁶

With reference to the *Temple de Gnide*, however, he has declared that, while directly licentious poetry is vicious, yet to move the passions is its essential purpose.⁷

So far as concerns his personal relation with poetry, he shows at best only a flowery and conventional esteem therefor. He feels impelled to use high-flown terms in speaking of Muses and Graces;⁸ and he takes great delight in quoting, in pondering over and elucidating single classical lines,⁹ which shows at any rate a care for the single word.¹⁰ But his praise of a work, as one editor remarks,¹¹ would be "c'est beau comme de la prose," which last Montesquieu distinguishes as a large and majestic river, against the *jet d'eau* of *beaux vers*.¹² His sole favorable

¹ VII, 133.

² *P. & F.*, II, 45. Cf. *sup.*, p. 86, note 1.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 43.

⁴ VII, 467.

⁵ Cf. *inf.*, p. 125.

⁶ VII, 469.

⁷ Cf. *sup.*, p. 91.

⁸ VII, 87, 388.

⁹ As exemplified *inf.*, p. 136. Also VII, 9; *P. & F.*, II, 7, 14, 58, and *Ibid.*, pp. 44 ff., where for pages he draws on the one line of Ovid.

¹⁰ Cf. *inf.*, p. 158.

¹¹ VII, 202.

¹² *P. & F.*, II, 12.

judgment as to the utility of poetry is that Plato was wrong and self-contradictory in banishing poets from the Republic.¹

Among the various nations, French poetry in itself may be bad, but their poets are perhaps good.² The mediæval product gives him little delight :

"On ne voit rien de si pitoyable que les poésies de cinq ou six siècles . . . de misérables ouvrages, faits par des gens qui n'avaient que des idées prises de l'Ecriture sainte."³

Yet everything, the number of poets, emulation and patronage, should have contributed to make good works—a state realized only when people began to read, imitate and approach unto the Ancients.⁴ The classics then, his constant choice, are also predominant in this field. For the English poets, they show rather a "rudesse originale d'invention" than a delicacy of taste.⁵

The invention, however, the "making," is what constitutes the genius of a poem, as of other works.⁶ Nor can he disregard the technical elements which enter in for its perfecting. He considers the quality of "déclamation" as closely allied to the music of the verse.⁷ The Italian recitative, "une déclamation plus haute," which is in its syllabic values akin to the English and German,⁸ is totally unsuited to the French.

"Chaque musique est donc excellente, c'est-à-dire la plus excellente que chaque langue puisse porter. Il me semble seulement que notre déclamation est meilleure, et notre musique, moins bonne."

The Italian declamation is feeble and unfit for tragedy, its rimed lines are insupportable, and its trochees, for physical reasons, inferior to the French iambics :

"Les iambes frappent mieux les organes. La longue qui finit le mot semble lui ajouter quelque chose; la brève qui le finit semble lui ôter quelque chose. Lorsque nous voulons mouvoir un corps, nous l'ébranlons et gardons toujours la grande percussion pour le fin. Il en est de même des mouvements de l'âme."

¹ *P. & F.*, I, 176; *P. & F.*, II, 20.

² *P. & F.*, II, 31.

³ *P. & F.*, I, 226-7.

⁴ Cf. *inf.*, p. 126.

⁵ IV, 356.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 52-3, cf. *sup.*, p. 81.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 4-5.

⁸ These languages, he asserts with decision, make only dactyls (!)—which approach nearer to the trochee than to the iambus.

Such is true cadence, as the ancients have shown.¹ Also, the French caesura is invariable, while the Italian can be changed. Feminine rimes in both languages are “trop douees,” and rime in general comes “lorsque l'on commence à sortir de la première barbarie.”² Transpositions, allowable in poetry, frequently give it an advantage over prose, as putting the important word in the right place.³ Climactic arrangement generally, whether of expression or thought, is desirable.⁴

His *tour de force* idea⁵ recurs: “Il sort de l'embarras des vers quelque chose qui plaît.”⁶ He again rejects ornaments, in so far as that means what is pretentious and *recherché*.⁷ Epithets, he thinks, should be frequent:

“Elles ajoutent toujours. Ce sont les couleurs, les images des objets.”⁸

They make the charm of *Télémaque*.

The element of mystery⁹ is also acknowledged.

For the psychology of poetry, such matters as brief or impetuous expression should depend upon the state of soul represented. Not everything should end epigrammatically.¹⁰ Finally, poetry and dogma are opposing poles, as illustrated by Racine and Boileau; the first revealed the sentiments, the grandeur of religion, whereas the second drew from Jansenism “des discussions théologiques, sujet étranger et ennemi de la poésie.”¹¹

Fiction constitutes a department which, in some particulars, is close to poetry. Immediately following his diatribes on the latter subject, Rica's librarian vents himself on

“les romans, dont les auteurs sont des espèces de poètes,¹² et qui outrent également le langage de l'esprit et celui du coeur; ils passent leur vie à chercher la nature, et la manquent toujours; leurs héros y sont aussi étrangers que les dragons ailés et les hippocentaures.”¹³

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 6-7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³ Cf., Spencer's *Philosophy of Style*, where he argues for the inverted or “direct” order as that which is at once the most effective and the most economic of attention.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 43.

⁵ Cf., *sup.*, p. 43.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58. Cf. *sup.*, p. 43.

⁸ *P. & F.*, I, 228.

⁹ Cf., *sup.*, p. 41.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹² The two are also associated in I, 435.

¹³ I, 426-7.

Rica assures him that the Persian authors are no better, fully as unnatural, and “extrêmement gênés par nos moeurs.” A lover must pass ten years of passion as preliminary to seeing the face of his mistress. Since the incidents cannot be varied, the romancers have resort to an artificial remedy worse than the disease—that is, to prodigies. “Ces aventures froides et souvent répétées nous font languir, et ces prodiges extravagants nous révoltent.”¹

Other allusions amply show that practically the only *romans* which Montesquieu knew² were the stories of chivalry or of wonder, certain of the old *romans d'aventure* and a wearisome number of their later cold imitations. In mediæval times, there were, to be sure, the “*romans grecs*,” but most important, he thinks, were the tales directly associated with chivalry and its marvels, the accounts of paladins, necromancers, fairies, enchanted palaces, etc.³ From the idea therein contained of championing weakness and punishing justice, came the whole modern conception of gallantry connected with love, the protection of women producing a desire to please them.

But prodigies and magic are what chiefly impress him. He speaks of “les merveilles des romans, où, après avoir passé par des rochers et des pays arides, on se trouve dans un lieu fait par les fées.”⁴ *Romans* please by the variety of prodigies.⁵ The “merveilleux” characterises fiction as well as the “Fable.”⁶ At Paphos, the volumes of stories are small, because “on en a retranché les histoires magiques et les conversations ennuyeuses.”⁷

In regard to the *Lettres persanes*, he claims for it a plot, and divines generally the important secret that novels please because we picture ourselves in the position of the hero or heroine. This is connected with his former appreciation of impressionism or the individual's private and personal judgment of things with reference to himself.—⁸

¹ I, 427.

² Except *Manon Lescaut*, cf. *inf.*, p. 139.

³ V, 308–9.

⁴ VII, 138.

⁵ VII, 123.

⁶ VII, 144. For the “Fable,” cf. *inf.*, p. 113.

⁷ VII, 467–8. ⁸ Cf. *sup.*, p. 53.

"Rien n'a plu davantage, dans les *Lettres persanes*, que d'y trouver, sans y penser, une espèce de roman. On en voit le commencement, le progrès, la fin : les divers personnages sont placés dans une chaîne qui les lie. . . ."

"D'ailleurs ces sortes de romans réussissent ordinairement, parce que l'on rend compte soi-même de sa situation actuelle ; ce qui fait plus sentir les passions que tous les récits qu'on en pourrait faire."¹

Moreover, digressions² are not allowed in the ordinary *roman*, except when virtually constituting a new story ; nor are disquisitions and reasonings permitted, as opposed to the design and nature of such a work.

Novels are bound faithfully to depict passions.³ For himself, he reads *romans* only when gloomy.⁴ Pure story-telling, by a *raconteur*, does not interest him for itself, but only for "la manière de la faire."⁵ This last must have been a powerful interest indeed, since he submitted to hearing one poor little *histoire* two hundred and twenty-nine times—"dont je fus très content."⁶

An allied form, the fable, receives some slight attention. The authors of the ancient fables are sought for, because they were "les nourrices des premiers temps et les vieillards qui amusaient leurs petits-enfants au coin du feu."⁷ What they related was unliterary, was as purely folk-lore tradition as a salacious story. The fables were later compiled by a Lokman, a Bidpai, an Esop, who may have added the moral reflections. The *genre*, however, was hardly invented by the Orientals for the sake of the moral.⁸ That sort of truth was likely to be more offensive than a direct statement, in its suggestion of stupidity in the hearer, and either kind is sufficiently unpleasant in particular application. It was useless, if the truth were merely general, to take the *détour* of an allegory. For why should a prince be shocked by a moral treatise?⁹

¹I, 47-8. For criticism of the "chaîne," cf. *inf.*, p. 194.

²Cf., *inf.*, p. 160. ³P. & F., I, 34-5. Cf. *sup.*, p. 86, note 1. ⁴vii, 377.

⁵Which might point to a lack of care for plot.—vii, 152.

⁶vii, 179. ⁷P. & F., II, 18-19.

⁸"Pour dire aux princes des vérités détournées."

⁹Cf. for morality, *sup.*, p. 37 and p. 82.

Montesquieu also uses the word ‘Fable,’ with a capital, nearly in the sense of “récit mythologique relatif au polythéisme.”¹ From the antique *vie champêtre* spring—

“cet air riant répandu dans toute la Fable . . . ces descriptions heureuses, ces aventures naïves, ces divinités gracieuses, ce spectacle d’un état assez différent du nôtre pour le désirer, et qui n’en est pas assez éloigné pour choquer la vraisemblance, enfin ce mélange de passions et de tranquillité.”²

Our imagination laughs at the idea of the gods and the nymphs, the woods, fields and fountains. The word ‘Fable’ thus acquired for him a flavor of *la vieille romance*, and in this special sense he loves to use it.³ Other broader meanings with him are ancient stories in general⁴ and a fiction as falsehood.⁵

Our author professes a becoming modesty in regard to his knowledge of the drama.⁶ He can only indicate his preferences and beliefs, and among these we have seen the high estimate which he places on the dramatists, as the first of the poets, the masters of passions.⁷ Again, this is the only *genre* in which the moderns have equaled the ancients, perhaps because it is rather an advantage to have disposed of the old mythological machinery, as unsuited to the movement and action of drama.⁸ Historically, he considers that the origin of the play was in “la joie des vendanges.”⁹ The interval from the ancients to the moderns he regards, as usual, a barren waste:¹⁰

“Nous faisions des pièces de théâtre avant Corneille et Rotrou. Nous les aurions faites toujours aussi mauvaises, si les ouvrages des Grecs n’avaient éclairé les dramatistes.”¹¹

The French came slowly to *Venceslas* and the *Cid* in comparison to the rapidity with which the Greeks reached excellence.¹²

¹ Littré, s. v. 4°.

² VII, 132—Such a passage as this represents his nearest approach to a conception of poetry.

³ VII, 144; *P. & F.*, II, 144, 287, 298.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 205.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 195, 258. Cf. the colloquial English.

⁶ “Je n’ai pas une grande connaissance sur les choses du théâtre,” VII, 314.

⁷ I, 426. Quoted *sup.*, p. 107.

⁸ *P. & F.*, I, 225.

⁹ VII, 170.

¹⁰ Cf. *sup.*, p. 71.

¹¹ *Voy.*, II, 374–5.

¹² *P. & F.*, I, 229, cf., *sup.*, p. 59.

Another modern advantage is that the plays to-day seem more virtuous, and Montesquieu can return benefited from a spectacle, where an ancient would have lamented his corruption.¹ As a usual thing, morality² is demanded by an audience :

“ Les hommes, fripons en détail, sont en gros de très honnêtes gens ; ils aiment la morale ; et si je ne traitais pas un sujet si grave, je dirais que cela se voit admirablement bien sur les théâtres : on est sûr de plaire au peuple par les sentiments que la morale avoue, et on est sûr de le choquer par ceux qu'elle reprouve.”³

Among the characteristics and requisites of the drama, he readily includes the three unities, which, he explains, mutually suppose one another.⁴ The unity of place requires that of time, much more time being needed for transportation to another place ; these two require a unity of action, for in a limited time and space there can only be one principal action. He agrees, too, that a play should have five acts,⁵ because, according to his friend Conti, everything should have a beginning, a middle and an end, and a link between each stage.⁶

His old principles of curiosity and surprise are invoked to account for the suspension of interest in the *trame*.⁷ It is considered a harder thing to make good dialogue⁸ for women than for men, the latter requiring only book-knowledge, while the former demands “l'usage du monde et des bienséances.”⁹ Proper characterization, indeed, is a most difficult thing, especially now that the great types have been taken.¹⁰ “ Il n'a qu'une trentaine de bons caractères, de caractères marqués.” He lists these, evidently after Molière and his colleagues, as : “ le Médecin, le Marquis, le Joueur, la Coquette, le Jaloux, l'Avare, le Misanthrope, le Bourgeois.” Our sympathy or aversion for personages, in comedy particularly, is an important point and should be managed with consistency.¹¹

¹ VII, 161–2. Though our moral authors would still proscribe the theatre—v, 163.

² Apparently the melodramatic morality.

³ v, 161, cf. *sup.*, p. 37.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 20.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 92.

⁶ *Voy.*, I, 307.

⁷ VII, 146.

⁸ Referring to Shakespeare. Cf. *inf.*, p. 151.

⁹ VII, 184.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 20–1.

¹¹ VII, 146.

A comedian should be careful to throw his countenance into the proper expression just before reciting his lines ; for these are only the effect of the antecedent new passions.¹ A comedy, in Rica's opinion, may take place rather in the audience than on the stage.² The spectators, at the *Français*,³ are themselves on exhibition, as languishing lovers, costumed actresses, or what not. He satirizes in this connection the society farce of the *foyer* and of the *petits-maitres*. Comedies should express rather the ridiculousness of manners than of passions, for passions in themselves are not ridiculous.⁴ Nor is it so important that an actor should say funny things as that he should represent really a ridiculous character.⁵ Sometimes the laughable element arises from seeing a personage in a situation opposed to his character, as a woman in straits, a grave man in a foolish position, an old man deceived.⁶ In extending this conception Montesquieu comes very near to admitting horse-play.

Tragedy is his real passion ;⁷ and the real passion of tragedy is terror.⁸ In his own age, good tragedies were an exhausted mine.⁹

History is the only large department spared in Rica's denunciation of books.¹⁰ He does not extol its study or its utility ; but he allows it to pass with a majestic and panoramic survey of the course of empire in various nations. Our author is quick to see the vital points which make or mar historical writing. As a pure literary *genre*, he remarks that it has been handled by a certain class of authors, who seek simply to be agreeable and amusing.¹¹ These select for treatment one special point or phase of history, like a revolution, writing with a unity of action which pleases the reader as a tragedy, and economizes his attention. This species turns from the fatiguing uninteresting facts with which dry chronicles are burdened. But he believes too, without reaching

¹*P. & F.*, II, 78-9.

²I, 121-2.

³Cf. on the Opéra, *sup.*, p. 76.

⁴VII, 162.

⁵*P. & F.*, II, 21.

⁶VII, 145-6.

⁷VII, 161 ; *P. & F.*, II, 56.

⁸VII, 161—After Aristotle ; or after Plato, it may give horror (*P. & F.*, II, 20).

⁹*P. & F.*, II, 20.

¹⁰I, 422 ff.

¹¹*P. & F.*, I, 27.

the full concept, that the study of history must be philosophic.¹ Some idea of comparative history may be found in his plea for allowing to each age its own ideas.²

A notion of the history which concerns itself with the life of the people is to be found in his objection to the Greek historians, that they give no glimpse of Grecian manners and laws.—“C'est comme si nous voulions trouver les nôtres en lisant les guerres de Louis XIV.”³ It may be that the ancient histories generally yield to the modern, in that our development of political art makes them “plus belles.”⁴ The mediæval historians, those of the Church and the Popes have an effect which is frequently the reverse of edifying.⁵ The English have the advantage of showing the progress of liberty.⁶

The French school, from jealousy or conviction, he singles out for special condemnation. Some have too much erudition for genius, and others too much genius for their erudition.⁷ They are often blinded by prejudice or partiality;⁸ their particular systems are their ruin;⁹ they will twist facts for their theory and select, from the mass of data, those which they need to display their own ideas and sentiments:¹⁰

“Toute l'histoire en corps n'est-elle pas un monument de l'aveuglement de nos pères à cet égard? Pour moi, j'aimerais mieux ne point écrire d'histoire que d'en écrire pour suivre les préjugés et les passions du temps. . . .”

“On ne fait pas un système après avoir lu l'histoire; mais on commence par le système, et on cherche ensuite les preuves.”

But the bitterest word yet on the French historians is:

“Ut, sicut prima aetas vidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quod in servitute.”¹¹

Subserviency and falsehood in history have perhaps been further advanced by the invention of printing.¹² Formerly a writer,

¹ Especially for princes (vii, 414)—For restrictions on this method, in so far as it is theoretical, cf. following page.

² v, 448; *P. & F.*, II, 191; cf. *sup.*, p. 52.

³ VII, 160–1.

⁴ VII, 179.

⁵ I, 422.

⁶ I, 423.

⁷ VII, 163. His criticisms here usually have an oblique reference to Dubos and Boulainvilliers, to whom he pays his compliments in the *E. L.* Cf. *inf.*, p. 147.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 193.

⁹ v, 448.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 251.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 250.

¹² *P. & F.*, II, 193–4.

being little heard, could cry his loudest and his best; but now his necessary circulation, the establishment of a censorship, and the fear of offending the powers that be tend to a disguisal of the truth. An upright historian, whose pen is not venal, is subject to a thousand persecutions.¹

This impatience with his predecessors may account for his judgment on histories in the large as “des faits faux composés sur des faits vrais, ou bien à l'occasion des vrais;”² and for that other opinion that, “on trouve dans les histoires les hommes peints en beau, et on ne les trouve pas tels qu'on les voit.”³

In regard to the criticism of sources, a point where in practice he has so often been accused of failing,⁴ he would seem at least in doctrine to recognise the importance of the principle. He says, for instance, that when we are looking for something in antiquity, we must be very careful lest our authorities themselves, from the influence of the personal equation, have departed a little from the truth.⁵

Montesquieu, when in a happy mood, likes old chronicles, “pour tempérer les biens et les maux.”⁶ The writers of memoirs suffer from the same complaint as historians and authors in general; only here it is themselves and not all men whom they would represent in a favorable attitude. They are “si visiblement vains qu'il est impossible qu'ils soient vrais. Ils ont tout fait dans la guerre et dans les affaires.”⁷ Yet recent memoirs,⁸ especially of the minority of Louis XIV, are certainly enormously popular to-day.⁹

Concerning letter-writing, he has only two curt observations. If their writers had reduced their long compliments and the petty details of their day, “ils auraient vu leurs ouvrages s'évanouir.”¹⁰ I have quoted his remark as to the passing of the epistolary style from the hands of pedants to those of the *gens du monde*.¹¹

¹ I, 464.

² VII, 174.

³ VII, 177, cf. *sup.*, p. 93.

⁴ Cf. *inf.*, p. 200.

⁵ P. & F., II, 190.

⁶ VII, 377.

⁷ P. & F., II, 193.

⁸ Excellent emetics (I, 457).

⁹ I, 348.

¹⁰ I, 52. This is *à propos* of the L. P., where he claims to have followed his precept.

¹¹ P. & F., II, 49. Cf. *sup.*, p. 87. .

The satire and the epigram may be considered together, the first being connected in his mind with criticism, and both being characterized by that *esprit*, which we have seen to be one of his chief preoccupations.¹ Is it satire purely or destructive criticism which he condemns as “*cette fureur de juger, cette honte de ne pas décider, cet air de mépris sur tout ce qu'on ne connaît pas, cette envie de râver tout ce qui se trouve trop haut?*”² Again, he denounces—

“*cette fureur pour la satire qui a fait multiplier parmi nous les écrits de cette espèce, qui produisent deux sortes de mauvais effets, en décourageant les talents de ceux qui en ont, et en produisant la malice stupide de ceux qui n'en ont pas. De là ce ton continual*³ *qui consiste à tourner en ridicule les choses bonnes et même les vertueuses.*”

The really great satire, like that of Aristophanes, is no more. The usual satire dies, while the work which it attacks still lives.⁴ Satire can be usefully employed as a weapon, for example, against fanaticism, but it is only “*pour le bien des hommes que l'on peut faire usage de la malignité humaine.*” A combat won in this way proves nothing, “*parce qu'une plaisanterie n'est pas une raison.*”⁵

A “*mauvais naturel*” seeks a too frequent repetition in satirical *traits*.⁶ Only two pedants, Boileau and Juvenal, have written satires on women—a subject in which, worthless as it is, Horace would have succeeded far better.

In ancient Rome, punishment was meted out to satirists and libellists.⁷ In despotic states, where oppression and ignorance together take away the talent and the will for such writing, satires are hardly known.⁸ Among the English, what with the spectacle of society and the disposition to retreat from life, “*leurs écrits satiriques seraient sanglants, et l'on verrait bien des Juvenals chez eux, avant d'avoir trouvé un Horace.*”⁹

He thinks it a mistake, in practical life, to hazard apophthegms;¹⁰ but he shows certainly a well-marked favor for the

¹ Cf. *sup.*, p. 89.

² *P. & F.*, I, 276.

³ “*Si commun dans notre nation,*” *Ibid.*, p. 277. ⁴ *E. g.* Virgil and Horace.

⁵ *P. & F.*, I, 277–8.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 52. Cf. VII, 63—“*Quel triste talent que celui de savoir déchirer les hommes.*” ⁷ III, 254. ⁸ IV, 83. ⁹ IV, 356. ¹⁰ VII, 411.

epigram. The quality of *naïveté*, which he has ascribed to so many things, even to *esprit*,¹ may add to the epigram as well.² Surprise is also an element. He approves of a certain “*belle réponse, parce qu'elle est contradictoire à celle que l'on attend.*”³ He recognises, in quoting,⁴ that the surprise and the sting are in the tail, and that here brevity is the soul of wit.⁵ Yet “*tout ne doit pas finir en épigramme.*”⁶

As a poetic form, the epigram was unknown until Martial, the Greeks being ignorant of the *acute dictum*, and writing only inscriptions.⁷ It is a form in which every word counts, as he well illustrates.⁸ He approves the opinion that the pentameter and hexameter verse “*attirent nécessairement l'épigramme;*”⁹ with which he leaves the subject.

“*Dans les critiques, il faut s'aider, non pas se détruire ; chercher le vrai, le bon, le beau ; éclairer ou réfléchir (réfléchir et rendre) la lumière par sa nature ; n'éclipser que par hazard.*”¹⁰

In such clear and decisive words does Montesquieu give his voice for the criticism which enlightens as opposed to the criticism which destroys ; an opinion quite in accord with his previous condemnation of satire, of pedantry and of narrow dogmatism. He illustrates and emphasizes his distinction in his mention of the Academy's *Critique sur le Cid*, “*critique sévère mais charmante ! . . . c'est là que l'on voit la louange des beautés si près de la critique des défauts.*”¹¹

Criticism¹² is not a profession to which a man should abandon himself.¹³ Posterity attaches a certain scorn to works of this class, be their sponsor even a Cato.¹⁴ There is, however, an art of criticism, and when one would abandon himself thereto, when he would direct the taste or the judgment of the public, he must consider whether, after all, he has the fortune to agree with those

¹ Cf. *sup.*, p. 92.

² *P. & F.*, II, 22.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 284.

⁴ VII, 129.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 42. Cf. the examples from Florus, VII, 121-2.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 42. The “*Qu'il mourût !*” of the old Horace shows the brevity without the wit.

⁷ The literal sense of the word, of course.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 15-16.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 41.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 26.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 50.

¹² Evidently in the pejorative sense. ¹³ *P. & F.*, II, 26.

¹⁴ If he is a Maevius, his *écrits injurieux* are doomed to oblivion (*Ibid.*, p. 41).

popular verdicts sealed by time.¹ For, in the long run, these verdicts will hold; and if you dissent, if you have only extraordinary opinions, "vous n'êtes pas propre pour la critique."²

Esoteric standards are then practically valueless. Nor is this all. It would seem that really good authors need no bush, no criticism or corrective.³ No words are too strong to excoriate that criticism which consists in disdain and intolerance, in unfairness and cavilling. The worst type is the ignorant wretch who can sustain life only by selling his insults to the book trade; whose works are read only for their malicious stings; whose acquaintance no one will avow and whose vileness justice must overtake.⁴

The third part of the *Défense* contains generalizations on criticism which were largely inspired by the reception the *Esprit des Lois* had met with from the Jansenist journal.⁵ No argument, he says, will hold, which makes a good book seem bad, or a bad book good, which confounds the ideas and standards of the different sciences.⁶ Nor is it fair to employ arguments which attack science itself.⁷ Knowledge of the thing treated and of its authorities is essential. The principle of fairness to the author is dwelt upon. It is not right to read into him ideas which he has not put down. His visible words are the only test. It is a mistake gratuitously to attribute evil thoughts and intentions to him.⁸ Elsewhere,⁹ Montesquieu maintains that it is unjust to suppose off-hand that the author has not seen and provided for the contradictions of which he might be hastily accused; that a critic must be sure he holds the entire system, the central object of the whole machinery, before he remarks on small wheels that turn in opposite directions. And that the criticism on the great

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 28 and *sup.* p. 47.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 27.—This, at least, I take to be the meaning of "A mesure qu'on a plus exigé des auteurs, on a moins exigé des critiques."

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 28.—The personal animus which our author would repudiate seems prominent in this.

⁵ The *Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques*, 9 and 16 October, 1749.

⁶ VI, 196–7.

⁷ That is, allow the *genre*. Cf. *P. & F.*, II, 27 and *sup.* p. 85.

⁸ Also VI, 198.

⁹ *P & F.*, II, 25. Still with palpable reference to the *E. L.*

Corneille which allowed first for the duty it owed him stands as a model of its kind.¹

The critic's task is as easy as the original author's is difficult, since the former has all the advantage of choosing the point of attack.² "Il n'y a rien de si ais  que de d truire les sentiments des autres."³ Critics are eternally contrasting an author's character with his works and making suchlike reflections, "parce qu'on les peut faire sans essayer beaucoup son esprit."⁴ In which connection, Montesquieu makes the old slur that ten thousand men can easily criticize what they cannot themselves create.⁵ This class of writing merits little indulgence when it shows as an ostentation of superiority over others and a source of human pride.⁶ Of all *genres* "elle est celui dans lequel il est plus difficile de montrer un bon naturel." It not infrequently has its root in jealousy⁷ and its impulse in iconoclasm.⁸

The writing of such *corbeaux* has two evil effects; it spoils the reasoning power of readers by causing them to take good for ill and *vice versa*; and it leaves no weapons to attack the really bad works, "de sorte que le public n'a plus de r gle pour les distinguer."⁹ For he fully recognises that, too numerous as they are,¹⁰ too prone to employ against things that warmth which is needed only to paint things,¹¹ destructive critics have yet their usefulness in certain directions. A bad work by a celebrated author must be unveiled for the benefit of knowledge.¹² His objection to the flimsy *journaux* is exactly that they make no attempt to criticize.¹³ Authors cannot judge themselves, because "s'ils eussent cru une phrase mauvaise, ils ne l'auraient pas mise;"¹⁴ after which the natural demand would be for some one to judge them. If he urges harmony and general forbearance in the Academy, it is because criticism has a thousand other battlefields.¹⁵

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 50. Cf. *sup.* p. 52.

⁴ I, 51-2.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 57.

⁸ VII, 432.

⁹ VI, 199.

¹² V, 452—Quoted *sup.*, p. 97.

² VI, 198.

⁶ VII, 198.

¹⁰ VII, 162.

¹³ I, 343.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 483.

⁷ VII, 478-9.

¹¹ VII, 432.

¹⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 156. And authors of criticisms, fearing to be hoisted with their own petard, "sont comme ce peintre qui, ayant peint un coq, d fendait 脿 ses apprentis de laisser approcher les coqs de son tableau." (*Ibid.*) ¹⁵ VII, 447.

The real aim of criticism, however, as indicated in the last paragraphs of his discussion,¹ is primarily neither destructive nor dogmatic. The first kind, as applied especially by his theological enemies, becomes a thing which limits the scope and “la somme du génie national.” Theology cannot be the criterion to bound all the sciences, any more than the principles of geometry will apply in taste.² Dogmatism is peculiarly dangerous—

“Rien n'étouffe plus la doctrine que de mettre à toutes les choses une robe de docteur : les gens qui veulent toujours enseigner, empêchent beaucoup d'apprendre ; il n'y a point de génie qu'on ne rétrécisse, lorsqu'on l'enveloppera d'un million de scrupules vains.”

Follows the fine passage on the repressive effect of such pedantry.³

Criticisms should not be considered as personal attacks until we are forced so to regard them. It is quite permissible to criticize works given to the public; for those who seek to enlighten others should surely seek to be enlightened themselves, and “ceux qui nous avertissent sont les compagnons de nos travaux.” This last Ste-Beuve calls a fine saying, “devise et louange de la vrai critique.”⁴ Finally, if the author and the critic are alike seeking truth, they have a common interest and cannot be enemies.⁵

Montesquieu has endeavored, he declares, to make his own criticism largely appreciative. Since he has read, so far as possible, only the best authors,⁶ he gives his opinion usually on those whom he esteems. “Je loue plus que je ne critique.”⁷

As to the President and his own critics, several things may be observed. Ste-Beuve has declared, “il était des plus sensibles à la critique,”⁸ which seems true with qualifications. Montesquieu admits that he has been tormented all his life by “ces petits beaux-esprits qui m'ont rompu la tête de ce qu'ils ont mal lu et de ce qu'ils n'ont pas lu.”⁹ But he speaks more indifferently elsewhere of “quelques frelons qui bourdonnent autour de moi,”

¹ *Défense*, 3^{me} partie, vi, 202–3.

³ Quoted *in extenso*, *sup.*, p. 53.

⁶ Cf. *sup.* p. 94.

⁹ *P. & F.*, i, 38.

⁴ *C. de L.*, xiii, 148.

⁷ *P. & F.*, i, 37–8.

² Quoted *sup.*, p. 50.

⁵ vii, 203.

⁸ *C. de L.*, vii, 80.

which buzzing he does not mind, if the bees get honey from his toil.¹ His editor remarks that superficial criticisms caused him irritation;² so did those written with malice aforethought; and more especially those directed against his whole manner of being and individuality. The Jansenists have wished him to make an *Esprit des Lois* according to their own plan and containing mainly the things theological with which they are concerned.³ Their objections are in their heads and not in his book.⁴ To another caviller he retorts: “mon intention a été de faire mon ouvrage et non pas le sien.”⁵ The “infinité de mauvaises critiques sur mon *Esprit des Lois*” were written by men who did not wish to understand him, that they might have a free field for declaiming—an easy sort of triumph.⁶

He has preferred to keep silent when attacked, both from scorn, and because he believes that calumnies will return to the address of the calumniator.⁷ “Mon principe a été de ne point me remettre sur les rangs avec des gens méprisables.”⁸

In regard to individuals, it is true that he contemptuously dismisses the Sorbonne,⁹ and puts it on a par with the “déclamations et fureurs” of the *Nouvelliste Ecclésiastique*;¹⁰ it is true that the preceding philippic against distorting an author’s meaning¹¹ was aimed at the *Journal de Trévoux*,¹² and the paragraph on allowing for contradictions in view of a possible system¹³ is his reply to de La Porte.¹⁴ He likewise showed some acrimony in dealing with Voltaire,¹⁵ notably in the response, “Il a trop d’esprit pour m’entendre.”¹⁶

¹ VII, 329.

² *P. & F.*, I, *Préface*, xv. It is perhaps hardly fair to quote the carefully erased passage in which he makes his bitterest retort—“Sur quelques petits auteurs qui me critiquaient, je dis: Je suis un grand chêne au pied duquel les crapauds viennent jeter leur venin” (*Ibid.*, p. 36).

³ VI, 196.

⁴ VII, 397.

⁵ VII, 386.

⁶ *P. & F.*, I, 36.

⁷ VII, 404.

⁸ VII, 405, cf. VII, 385—“Depuis le futile de la Porte jusqu’au pesant Dupin, je ne vois rien qui ait assez de poids pour mériter que je réponde aux critiques.”

⁹ VII, 197.

¹⁰ VII, 386.

¹¹ *Sup.*, p. 120.

¹² *P. & F.*, II, 27.

¹³ *Sup.*, p. 120.

¹⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 25.

¹⁵ Cf. *inf.*, p. 144.

¹⁶ VII, 397.

But this is only one side of the medal. Again and again in his letters, he invites criticism from his friends and approves it from strangers. He profits by the strictures of Mme. de Mirepoix and admires her taste;¹ he requests corrections from Mme. d'Aiguillon;² he gives Guasco liberty to judge and criticize;³ he congratulates Grosley on his objections and his knowledge,⁴ and replies with good humor to his points;⁵ he thinks Gerdil meritorious;⁶ he is enchanted with Bertolini—"Je m'y trouve paré comme dans un jour de fête;"⁷ and he thanks Risteau for his "éloges flatteurs."⁸ In general, he is willing to admit a difference of opinion on small points,⁹ though he objects when Vernet, unsolicited, corrects his French.¹⁰ This last seems to give the clue to the situation: among friends and fair-minded critics he is perfectly willing to allow minor dissent and corrections, if there is agreement on main issues; but those who largely condemn, misunderstand or misconstrue his position, especially if acrimony is added, arouse his indignation and his scorn. Which seems, on the whole, neither an unnatural nor an unreasonable attitude.

6.

ANCIENTS AND MODERNS.

The unique importance of this subject at the time of Montesquieu's writing has made it seem worth while to devote to it a section. Many correspondences will be found between the present treatment and that outlined, more purely as a matter of principle, under Classicism and Individualism.¹¹ I shall still reserve for the next section the authors separately discussed, contrasting here the two broad types of the old and the new order of writers.

At the outset, Montesquieu is quick to declare that the academic Quarrel does not concern him, that he is impartial in the matter, and esteems equally both the ancients and the moderns,—

¹ VII, 264.² VII, 423.³ VII, 273.⁴ VII, 396.⁵ VII, 334.⁶ VII, 397.⁷ VII, 442.⁸ VII, 375.⁹ VII, 344.¹⁰ VII, 296.¹¹ Cf. *sup.*, p. 48.

"Je n'ai aucune prédilection pour les ouvrages anciens ou nouveaux, et toutes les disputes à cet égard ne me prouvent autre chose si ce n'est qu'il y a de très bons ouvrages, et parmi les anciens, et parmi les modernes."¹

This absolute statement, however, must be taken with a grain of salt. There is abundant testimony to show which way the balance leaned for him. There is the general observation that we have no right to prefer new books until we know the old.² There is the specific and direct avowal of his preference for the ancients—

"J'avoue mon goût pour les anciens ; cette antiquité m'enchaîne, et je suis toujours prêt à dire avec Pline : C'est à Athènes que vous allez, respectez les dieux."³

Again, he has always had a decided taste for the ancients,⁴ he has admired some criticisms against them, but he has admired them most ; and he thinks his taste may be justified.⁵

As Sorel has finely observed,⁶ it is only in antiquity that the President finds poetry, that he himself reveals some poetic impulse.⁷ Accordingly, at Paphos, Ovid and Tibullus may rank with Anacreon and Sappho ; "mais entre les vers du siècle d'Ovide et ceux de notre temps, les Grâces judicieuses ont laissé l'espace de bien des livres."⁸

New books may be good for readers ; the ancient are for authors.⁹ Theirs was the superiority in point of *bon sens*, in purity of style.¹⁰ For their present dominance, the rules of the Greek tragedians are still unsurpassed and unchangeable.¹¹

He has the humanistic evaluation of antiquity when he affirms, "je suis naturellement curieux de tous les fragments des ouvrages

¹ *P. & F.*, I, 38 ; cf. *P. & F.*, II, 29, where he likes the Quarrel, as proving the same thing.

² I, 343.

³ VII, 158. This heads the first of two sections, "Des Anciens ; Des Modernes," in the *Pensées diverses*. They include fragmentary remarks, largely on individuals, rather than a *raisonné* account of the matter, and it has seemed as well to dispose of such scattered utterances as the order of our arrangement calls for them. For Antiquity, cf. *sup.*, p. 11.

⁴ VII, 159.

⁵ Cf. *sup.*, p. 47.

⁶ *Mont.*, p. 21.

⁷ Cf. *sup.*, p. 113.

⁸ VII, 467.

⁹ VII, 159.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 46. These are, however, merely casual generalizations, with real reference to one special case.

¹¹ VII, 150. Cf. *sup.*, p. 49.

des anciens auteurs ; ”¹ when he would have a catalogue made of all the lost books cited by the ancients.² He has the poetic evaluation when he regrets “cet air riant” which marked the antique world, that “simplicité de moeurs, naïveté de la nature,”³ even that taste for the marvellous, which however, might be criticised—

“Ce qui frappe le plus chez les anciens auteurs, c'est que leurs épisodes se ressemblent presque toutes.”⁴

These oracles and *enlèvements*, this conquering of monsters, etc., form always the same adventures under different names.⁵

The ancients, it has been remarked, were sufficiently salacious.⁶ It is a poor reproach to tax them with glorifying merely the physical strength of heroes, since it is in nature that the body should excite admiration and move to the marvellous.⁷ It is also unfair to insist on a circumstantial comparison between the modern and ancient poets, which latter “décrivent les moeurs et les costumes, et dont les beautés, même les moins fines, dépendent, la plupart, des circonstances oubliées, ou qui ne touchent plus.”⁸ This *Culturgeschichte* element he again allows, when he likes to read the ancients “pour voir d'autres préjugés.”⁹

Comparison¹⁰ may not be circumstantial, but in the large it is inevitable. As a criterion, it results naturally from the process of imitation,¹¹ which seemed to Montesquieu, for the forming of taste at least, equally as necessary. The French had only “misérables ouvrages” until the Renaissance period—

“Mais, dès que l'on commença à lire les Anciens, que l'on eût perdu un siècle à les commenter et à les traduire, on vit paraître des auteurs, et (ce qui me semble faire la gloire des Anciens) on peut leur comparer les Modernes.”¹¹

He has manifested his astonishment that the English can admire the ancients so much without imitating them.¹²

¹P. & F., II, 39.

²P. & F., II, 64.

³P. & F., I, 310–12. For the “simplicity” cf. sup., p. 43.

⁴P. & F., I, 309.

⁵Cf. sup., p. 91.

⁶P. & F., I, 227–8.

⁷P. & F., I, 227.

⁸VII, 160.

⁹Cf. sup. p. 32.

¹⁰Cf. sup., p. 50.

¹¹P. & F., I, 227.

¹²VII, 169; P. & F., II, 30.

The Quarrel is, of course, another point of contact. The *Lutrin*, wherein the ancients were not taken as models, is the best argument that Perrault's cause could have. Against its own author's opinion, it is a fine plea for the moderns.¹ It is chiefly, however, a later phase of the Quarrel, the dispute on Homer, that excites comment from Montesquieu. He has ridiculed in the *Lettres persanes* the whole puerile discussion, as begotten by *beaux esprits*—

"Par exemple, lorsque j'arrivais à Paris, je les trouvai échauffés sur une dispute la plus mince qu'il se puisse imaginer : il s'agissait de la réputation d'un vieux poète grec. . . . Les deux partis avouaient que c'était un poète excellent : il n'était question que du plus ou du moins de mérite qu'il fallait lui attribuer."²

Everyone wished to assign the per cent; and among so many distributors of reputation, "les uns faisaient meilleur poids que les autres." This was the trouble. It gave rise to coarse insults and bitter pleasantries, and Usbek fears greatly the implacable hate of these people, whose enmity could be stirred by such a trifle.

More seriously, he considers that Pope has come off best in the Quarrel, since he alone realized the greatness of Homer, which was the essential point.³ Madame Dacier showed zeal without knowledge, and dragged LaMotte into details. The latter, with this *esprit retréci*, lacked sentiment and an acquaintance with Antiquity—a deficiency, which, from the President's standpoint, was largely shared by the other disputants.

There are some things that may be said for modern writers, and more things against them. It may be that if the old world had better *esprits*, the new has at times better works.⁴ It is difficult to write ill, now that we are experts on taste.⁵ Yet there is far more to mar the modern literatures than to make them. This exclamation gives one cause for decadence :

"Quel siècle que le nôtre, où il y a tant de critiques et de juges, et si peu de lecteurs."⁶

¹P. & F., II, 53.

²I, 141-2.

³P. & F., II, 29-30.

⁴P. & F., I, 228.

⁵P. & F., II, 51; cf. sup., p. 46.

⁶VII, 162.

Amusements are too numerous for reading.¹ Among other and graver causes, there is the taste for *badinage* and paradox, the dominance of women and conversation.² There is the penchant for ridicule, the spirit of the *nil admirari*—“On ne saurait croire jusques où a été, dans ce dernier siècle, la décadence de l’admiration.”³ He would explain the general lack of taste for Corneille or Racine, as due to the ridicule which is poured upon all things for which a great intelligence is needed. Then, anything which has a determined object, anything which smacks of specialism will not be tolerated.

“On ne connaît que les objets généraux, et, dans la pratique, cela se réduit à rien. C’est le commerce des femmes qui nous a menés là : car c’est leur caractère de n’être attachées à rien de fixe. Il n’y a plus qu’un sexe, et nous sommes tous femmes par l’esprit. . .”⁴

Sentiment also seems ridiculous, and natural family affection, and the strong emotions of tragedy.⁵ All these were sources of appreciation for his ancestors, as they would be for any people “dont les moeurs seraient moins corrompues que les nôtres. Nous sommes parvenus à une trop malheureuse délicatesse.”

It was thought until lately that a devotion to letters was inappropriate in a *grand seigneur*⁶—a sentiment which has been ascribed to Montesquieu himself.⁷ This would be the pride of birth. More explicitly harmful is the *philosophe* spirit—

“Un certain esprit de gloire et de valeur se perd peu à peu parmi nous. La philosophie a gagné du terrain,⁸ les idées anciennes d’héroïsme et de bravoure, et les nouvelles de chevalerie se sont perdues.”⁹

With this is connected the yielding to method and the supremacy of commercialism and calculation.

¹P. & F., II, 34.

²I, 149 ; I, 216 ; VII, 178.

³P. & F., II, 33, cf. *Ibid.*, p. 51—“Nous jugeons des ouvrages d’esprit avec le dégoût des Sultans.”

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 33. Cf. *sup.* under Women and *Esprit*.

⁵P. & F., II, 56–7. Quoted *sup.*, p. 82.

⁶VII, 85.—Relative to the Marshal of Berwick.

⁷Cf. *inf.*, p. 189.

⁸And he adds in another reading (*P. & F.*, II, 141)—“j’ose même dire un certain bon sens.”

⁹VII, 175. Though he thinks too that the *philosophe* spirit has left alone the character and manners, while gaining the mind.

This surely seems ‘modern’ enough, too modern for the eighteenth century. It is, for a moment, the theme of Burke’s threnody on the age of chivalry.

He returns to literature and to the Quarrel, again belittling the latter and again asserting that even its conceded and boasted *bon sens* is not enough for the former in this age :

“Un siècle où le souverain mérite est de penser juste, et qui, dans le temps qu’il admire une belle traduction de l’*Iliade*, n’est pas moins frappé d’un mauvais raisonnement sur l’*Iliade*.¹”¹

7.

INDIVIDUAL AUTHORS.

Before entering on the large field of the different literatures with which Montesquieu was more or less acquainted, it may be well to take some account of his views on the various languages, as well as to show to what degree he was versed in foreign tongues.

Latin he undoubtedly knew and thoroughly. Greek he could hardly have known for reading purposes. Such familiarity as he had with Greek authors seems to have come, in the large majority of cases, from secondary sources and translations.² Of the modern tongues, he knew something of Italian and English. He quotes from both, and drops into both for phrases or description, in his fragmentary writings.³ But he admits, “je ne suis pas assez fort dans la langue italienne pour juger de la diction.”⁴ As to English :

“It does not appear that he had prepared himself for his visit to England by acquiring the language.”⁵

¹P. & F., I, 224.

²Ste-Beuve (*C. de L.*, XII, 81) is convinced that none of the great four read Homer directly.

³Cf. “I said to her,” &c., in P. & F., and the remarks on technique in painting, *Voy.* I, *passim*.

⁴vii, 440.

⁵Collins, *Mont. in England*, p. 339.

The same writer accounts for the fact that the President's relations in England were rather with the social than the literary set,¹ by assuming that "though he could read English and follow it, when spoken, with perfect facility, he could not speak it intelligibly."² And anecdotes are cited which seem to support these statements, save as to the point of "perfect facility."

We may then suppose a reading knowledge of Italian and English, sufficient for a respectable amateur acquaintance with the masterpieces in these tongues; but the knowledge which makes for an adequate literary appreciation can be predicated only of French and Latin.

His remarks on language and the languages are certainly piquant and perhaps illuminative. From an academician's standpoint, as he pleasantly states, French should gain ground abroad every day and ultimately become the common language for the communication of the peoples.³ It shines, in contrast to the Latin, by its definiteness and, in a way, by its lack of charm :

"C'est que le français représente au Français les choses comme elles sont : il lui donne une idée juste, qui est si claire qu'il n'en peut pas ajouter d'accessoires. Dans le latin, que nous n'entendons pas parfaitement, l'imagination ajoute à la véritable idée une idée accessoire, qui est toujours plus agréable."⁴

French pronunciation may seem like song to a foreigner, because "tout ce qui s'éloigne de la prononciation ordinaire paraît chant."⁵ French versification, it has been seen,⁶ is composed of iambics, as contrasted with the Italian trochee and the *dactyl* of the English and the German. This works against exact correspondence in translation, as does also the fact that "la langue française est plus pure et plus simple, et l'italienne est plus haute et plus élevée."⁷ The former, as opposed to Latin, cannot be so *serré* on account of its articles. "Ces articles sont des non-valeurs." The fixity of the Italian⁸ seems to him due to the lack of a common central Court, whose changes would be accepted throughout the country.⁹

¹ But cf. *inf.*, p. 152.

² *Ibid.*, p. 382.

³ VII, 221.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 67. Cf. *sup.*, p. 42.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 4.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 4-5, cf. *sup.*, p. 109.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 6.

⁸ That is, the Tuscan.

⁹ *Voy.*, I, 54.

The English, strangely capable of some "jolies choses" is, on the whole, frankly "barbarous."¹ What indicates, more than these sporadic and unsafe judgments, that he had something of the philological instinct is his preoccupation, in translation and in original expression, with semasiological niceties.²

Proceeding to the literatures, two cautions must first be taken. The President cannot always be credited with impartial views. Towards his friends and well-wishers, his criticisms are lenient and complimentary.³ Towards his detractors and opponents, he does not always manifest a pure liberality.⁴ Again, there is a tendency towards a superficial, hasty or *raffiné* sort of criticism, well illustrated in his comparison, already mentioned,⁵ between certain painters and authors. This comparison, as a curious sample of singular insufficiency, may well be given :⁶

"S'il faut donner le caractère de nos poètes, je compare Corneille à Michel-Ange, Racine à Raphael, Marot (La Fontaine) au Corrège, La Fontaine (Marot) au Titien, Despréaux au Dominquin (aux Carraches), Crébillon au Guerchin, Voltaire au Guide, Fontenelle au Bernin, Chapelle, La Fare et Chaulieu au Parmesan, le père Lemoine à Joseph Pin, Regnier au Giorgione, La Motte au Rembrand, Chapelain est au-dessous d'Albert Dürer.⁷ Si nous avions un Milton, je le comparerais à Jules Romain. Si nous avions le Tasse, nous le comparerions aux Carraches. Si nous avions l'Arioste, nous ne le comparerions à personne, parce que personne ne lui peut être comparé."

It is true that something, though not very much, may be derived from the first part of this catalogue; but in the main it is at once categorical and indefinite. The uncertainty shown in his substitutions is significant.

Montesquieu was always a great reader and had supremely the faculty of turning grass to wool. Both Bernadau⁸ and Walckenaer⁹

¹*P. & F.*, II, 31.

²*P. & F.*, II, 8 and *passim*.

³vii, 381, 388. Especially is he kind to Hume. (vii, 320-1), cf. *inf.*, p. 152.

⁴E. g., his attitude towards Voltaire, Boulainvilliers and Dubos. Cf. *inf.*, pp. 144, 147.

⁵Cf. *sup.*, p. 33.

⁶vii, 163. Also (fuller) *P. & F.*, II, 49 and *Notes*, p. 539. The variants are found in the last reference.

⁷In place of this the *Notes* give—"Rotrou est mieux qu'Albert Dürer ; le Pinturicchio est notre Chapelain."

⁸*Tableaux*, p. 194.

⁹Who had access to M's notes on his reading—the *Spicilegium* which is still unpublished. (*Montesquieu in Biog. Univ.*, p. 89.)

express, in identical words, their astonishment at the prodigious quantity of books he had read, and at the fact that “les pensées les plus remarquables et les plus profondes lui étaient presque toujours suggérées par des ouvrages frivoles ; et il en lisait beaucoup de ce genre.”

We are fortunate in having a number of details as to his private reading and the composition of his library.¹

¹ It seems worth while to give a summary of this information. First, as to his youthful reading, there is an anonymous ms. note to the Bibliothèque Nationale copy of Solignac's *Eloge*. Among “des écrits que son Père lui mit en main” were, according to this annotator, “Cicéron, Horace, Plutarque, Lucien, Rabelais, Montaigne, Bayle, Locke, Lafontaine, Molière, Pascal, Bodin, Pufendorf, Desbans, Grotius, Descartes, Neuton (*sic*), Gassendi, Lamotte, Le Vayer, Platon, Lucifer, l'Aloisia (?), Théophile, Verville, Sextus Empiricus, Lacru, les transactions philosophiques, les Mém. de l'Académie des sciences.”—(*Eloge*, pp. 250–1). And Labat (*La Brède*, p. 183) found in the note-books of Montesquieu's youth a list of authors “qui semble indiquer dans leur ordre ceux qui étaient alors de sa prédilection. C'était Molière, Corneille, Racine, Boileau, Pascal, Rabelais, Montaigne, Labruyère, Cervantes.” These last, he considers, may have given the germ of inspiration for the *L. P.*.

As to the President's library, it results from inventories and examinations made by Brunet (Migne, XLIII, col. 344–6, and *Bulletin*, pp. 33–6) and Labat (*op. cit.*, pp. 181–2) that, although there is some account of a collection of 4,000 volumes, the working library of Montesquieu himself at the time of his death consisted of just 1556 works. This is still, with some exceptions, at La Brède. It included :

Theology, 291 works—9 Bibles, 11 Testaments, many Fathers and commentaries.
Jurisprudence, 324 works.

Sciences et arts, 318. Numerous works on medicine and exact sciences, some on occult sciences. Plato, Aristotle, Montaigne, Charron, Bacon, Hobbes, 6 Euclids, 2 Plinies.

Belles-Lettres, 267. Accounted in this class are, curiously enough, Du Cange, 3 Greek dictionaries, 2 Ciceros, Demosthenes, Homer, Lycophron, 4 Virgils, 4 Horaces, 4 Juvenals. Some few Elzevirs and Aldines, but editions usually small and worthless 16th century, from the presses of Bâle or Lyons.

French Literature—not rich. Marot, Rabelais, Ronsard and 17th century classics.

Italian Literature—feeble. Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso.

History, 306. Many travels. Marco Polo, Pinto, Chardin, etc. Ancient historians in great number. French—Gregory of Tours, Villehardouin, Monstrelet, de Thou, Commines, etc. Also several collections for archæology. Literary history poor (3 Bibliothèques, Photius).

All of the authorities mentioned call attention to the predominance and importance of the ancients; to the number of works on travels; to the fact that it is a library *ad usum* rather than a collection *de luxe* or of rarities.

Further, we may remark that it is a library rather of the legislist, historian and

Of the various literatures, we may consider first the Oriental. The Bible, which he quotes occasionally in the Vulgate, impresses him peculiarly for its poetic quality.¹ Its original character, the character which makes it respected, should be conserved in translations—which recommendation he makes also for other religious books, such as the Koran and the monuments of the Guèbres. He contrasts the Scriptures with the Talmud, the former exemplifying “l’extraordinaire dans le grand,” while the latter is only “l’extraordinaire dans le petit.”² In the Koran also, spite of its figured style and its forceful expression, there are a number of puerilities :

“ Il semble d’abord que les livres inspirés ne sont que les idées divines rendues en langage humain : au contraire dans notre alcoran (*sic*) on trouve souvent le langage de Dieu et les idées des hommes.”³

The religious is not the only form in which Orientalism appealed to our author. Sorel has called attention to his taste for the *Arabian Nights*,⁴ which, however, he mentions only casually.⁵ There is something certainly of its flavor in his shorter tales,⁶ as Fortage points out,⁷ though hardly in the *Lettres persanes*.

The Greeks, whose supremacy in all arts has been heretofore posited,⁸ receive as writers from the President an admiration generally enthusiastic, though somewhat vague, unreasoned and traditional. He thinks that they showed less of *esprit*, less of the epigrammatic touch than the Latins.⁹ And there is the remarkable statement that “les Grecs étaient hardis pour le style et timides pour la pensée.” He discusses only the half-dozen leading lights, with special fondness for Homer.

scholar than of the man of letters. Pure literature occupies a subordinate place—if we except Du Cange and his consorts. The classics, Latin, French, and Italian are respectably present, but not as the back-bone of the collection.

¹ VII, 347-8, cf. *sup.*, p. 95.

² *Mél. in.*, 137.

³ I, 312.

⁴ *Mont.*, p. 27.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 108.

⁶ *A. & I.* One might add the episodic and salacious tales of the *L. P.*

⁷ Ed. *Hist. vérit.*, p. xii. According to this editor, he read Galland’s adaptation of the *Nights* (1703-1711).

⁸ Cf. *sup.*, pp. 49, 58. Also Greece showed the Universe “le goût et les arts portés à un point que de croire les surpasser sera toujours ne les pas connaître” (IV, 414).

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 30.

For the blind bard, indeed, the force of praising can no farther go. The *Odyssey* is emphatically the most beautiful poem in the world, after the *Iliad*, which is the first.¹ In an opinion which he at least encourages, there are only two epic poems, the *Iliad* and perhaps the *Aeneid*.² Homer surpasses Virgil for grandeur and variety of characters.³ The first poet made possible the second, who, however, “manquait du beau feu d’Homère.”⁴ Variety of episodes, of movement, of *récits*, of combats, is the quality of Homer which is dwelt upon.⁵ His descriptions and comparisons are found *riantes* and admirable.⁶ The rapidity of his action, his warmth, the natural development of his subject, his tempered and enveloping use of the marvellous, the simplicity with which he depicts customs, finally his patriotism—all are commended.⁷ It is quite possible that he imitated some one, and the *cantilenae* theory of his epics is considered likely.

Homer “n’a été théologien que pour être poète,” nor is he to be regarded as the father and master of all the sciences, a ridiculous claim for any author.⁸ His continual greatness is shown indirectly by the excellence of the *Télémaque*,⁹ and is also the principal point that evolves from the Quarrel.¹⁰

The error which Montesquieu attributes to the Greeks, of taking relative qualities as absolute, is held to have “inundated all their philosophy,” to have been the *fléau* and deception of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.¹¹ This Greek philosophy was “très peu de chose” and has “gâté tout l’Univers.”¹² Aristotle’s thought is qualified as a profitless jargon,¹³ his obscurity is reprimanded,¹⁴ he is unjustly accused of personal prejudice and jealousy in his *Politics*.¹⁵ Plato is judged a little more leniently. He is one of the four great poets,¹⁶ his system is beautiful enough to be of our own day,¹⁷

¹ IV, 405.

² I, 425. So thinks his editor, though both may be of Homer.

³ VII, 159.

⁴ P. & F., II, 36.

⁵ P. & F., II, 35–6. Granted, however, that the Homeric epithets grow wearisome (*Ibid.*, 55).

⁶ VII, 423; P. & F., II, 35.

⁷ P. & F., II, 35–7.

⁸ P. & F., I, 223.

⁹ VII, 158.

¹⁰ I, 141–2; P. & F., II, 29–30.

¹¹ VII, 159–60.

¹² P. & F., II, 489.

¹³ P. & F., II, 492.

¹⁴ P. & F., II, 202.

¹⁵ V, 414.

¹⁶ VII, 171.

¹⁷ P. & F., II, 489.

some of his opinions are quoted with approval.¹ But he says “presque rien que des paroles”² and he too is accused of partiality.³ Nor is his Republic more ideal than that of Sparta.⁴ Both authors must be read, however, for a just idea of the laws and manners of ancient Greece.⁵

The dramatists, he has remarked, are supreme in invention and passion.⁶ Demosthenes impresses him as opposed to declamation⁷ and is the provoking cause of a *beau mot*—“dès qu'il ne foudroie pas, il est simple; tel que le ciel, il est presque toujours serein, et il ne tonne que par intervalles.”⁸ Plutarch is about the only *spirituel* Greek.⁹ “Plutarque me charme toujours: il a des circonstances attachées aux personnes qui font toujours plaisir.”¹⁰ That is to say, he has the art of arousing sympathy for his personages, seen particularly in the Death of Caesar.

Montesquieu pleads the Latins as his special admiration.¹¹ It may accordingly be expected that he will have more to say, and more of value to say, regarding his favorite authors. But the net result is not so very large.

Virgil, it has just been seen, is inferior to Homer in character-drawing and invention—but is his equal for pure poetic beauty.¹² He lacks the Homeric fire, and is finer in his first books, where he imitates the *Odyssey*, than in his last where he follows the *Iliad*.¹³ So the last books give our author less pleasure, as being too long drawn out and comparatively uninteresting.¹⁴ Yet, as compared with such a one as Lucan, he stands forth as Raphael toward the Venetian School—more natural, if less *frappant*.¹⁵

Horace is barely mentioned as capable of awkwardness in dialogue,¹⁶ and great in satire.¹⁷ Juvenal is there his inferior. His satire on women is the work of a pedant.

Ovid came nearer appealing to the President. There is the

¹*Ibid.*, 489–91.

²*P. & F.*, II, 202.

³ v, 414.

⁴ VII, 161.

⁵ VII, 160.

⁶ Quoted *sup.*, p. 107.

⁷ Cf. *inf.*, p. 156.

⁸*P. & F.*, I, 216.

⁹*P. & F.*, II, 30.

¹⁰*P. & F.*, II, 38.

¹¹ VII, 158–9, cf. *sup.*, pp. 125, 130.

¹⁴*P. & F.*, II, 39–40.

¹² VII, 159.

¹³*P. & F.*, II, 36.

¹⁵*P. & F.*, II, 52.

¹⁵ VII, 136.

¹⁶*P. & F.*, II, 40.

story of Charlemont¹ that the book Montesquieu was reading at the time of his visit turned out to be the most gallant of that poet's elegies. At Paphos, Ovid and Tibullus are ranked by the Graces with Anacreon and Sappho.² The *Ars Amoris* surely "knows how to please."³ Ovid and Bussy are "deux exiles qui n'ont su soutenir leur mauvaise fortune."⁴ The former is admirable in painting passions, too swift to be diffuse and hardly so much addicted to *esprit* as has been claimed.⁵ On one verse of the poet's—

Et matronales erubuere genae.

our author spends pages of disquisition.⁶

Cicero is "un des plus grands esprits qui aient jamais été : l'âme toujours belle lorsqu'elle n'était pas faible."⁷ According to Vian⁸ and Labat, the orator is for the President "celui de tous les anciens auquel il aurait aimé le mieux à ressembler." The *Discours sur Cicéron*,⁹ a product of Montesquieu's youth, declares the elevating effect of reading the Roman, accords fervid praise to his personal merit, his eloquence, "toute grande, toute majestueuse, toute héroïque," the *hardiesse* of his expressions and the vivacity of his sentiments, his transports, his portraits, the profundity of his philosophy, etc.

For the historians, there is none like the ornate, epigrammatical, antithetical Florus, an admiration which on Montesquieu's part is most significant. This writer is quoted approvingly for his striking concision, his power of giving a whole thought by suggestion in the fewest possible words;¹⁰ as also for his use of antithesis in its larger sense, as a true contrast of ideas.¹¹ His habit is to astonish and impress the imagination.

Livy is "un peu déclamateur, et ce qu'il y a d'admirable, il ne l'est pas dans ses belles harangues."¹² It is a pity to see him

¹ Hardy, *Mem. of Charlemont*, I, 62.

² VII, 467.

³ VII, 478.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 44-6. For, if so, *esprit* would reign in his works as in those of Marini. But Ovid "prenait le caractère qui était propre à chaque sujet."

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41-4.

⁷ VII, 159.

⁹ *Mél. in.*, pp. 3 ff.

⁸ *Hist.*, p. 145.

¹⁰ VII, 121-2.

¹¹ VII, 138-9. For Montesquieu's endorsement of such doctrine, see *inf.*, under Style, p. 159 and under Application, p. 192.

¹² *P. & F.*, II, 47. Cf. on Demosthenes, just above.

“jeter ses fleurs sur ces énormes colosses de l’antiquité.”¹ The subtle reflections of Tacitus are useless for politicians—because the facts which inspired them would take all eternity to come again.² But he too is praised for concision, as a writer “qui abrégéait tout, parce qu’il voyait tout.”³ And d’Alembert would have it that Tacitus has helped Montesquieu much.⁴

An unorthodox taste, thereby the more suggestive, is that for the *Péripole* of Hannon, whose authenticity is more than doubtful. Our writer purposely repeats his praise—⁵

“C’est un beau morceau de l’antiquité que la relation d’Hannon : le même homme qui a executé a écrit ; il ne met aucune ostentation dans ses récits. . . Les choses sont comme le style. Il ne donne point dans le merveilleux.”⁶

A stricter standard is shown in the condemnation of Quintus Curtius, by the side of whom even Arrian shines forth—

“On ne sait guère quel est le rhéteur qui, sans savoir et sans jugement, promène Alexandre sur une terre qu’il ne connaît pas, et qui le couvre de petites fleurs, et qui a écrit sans connaître une seule des sources où il devait puiser.”⁷

The ancients have not cited him at all, and although the purity of his style (?) shows his antiquity, only an age of barbarism could bring him from oblivion to the schools.

Seneca is mentioned humorously as a philosophic consolation,⁸ his *Thyestes* is ridiculed for its lack of historical perspective.⁹ Lucretius is lengthily quoted, but his arguments and some of his philosophy are deemed of little value.¹⁰ Marcus Aurelius is warmly lauded :

“Jamais philosophe n’a mieux fait sentir aux hommes, les douceurs de la vertu et la dignité de leur être que Marc Antonin : le cœur est touché, l’âme agrandie, l’esprit élevé.”¹⁰

Of the Fathers, Montesquieu mentions only St. Augustine,

¹ II, 150.

² *P. & F.*, II, 309.

³ V, 418.

⁴ *Eloge*, p. xix.

⁵ IV, 434; VII, 110.

⁸ VII, 144.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 46.

⁷ I, 134.

⁹ At beginning of *E. L.*, Ch. xxiii (v, 57). Also *P. & F.*, II, 195 ff., where his plea for the destruction of the world “proves too much.”

¹⁰ VII, 160.

whose *Civitas Dei* we know that he possessed in manuscript.¹ And this author he mentions only to condemn his continual use of antithesis.²

French literature naturally occupies the first place in our writer's regard and attention. It has been seen that he considers the course of French letters as running parallel with the growth of the French monarchy.³ The "sombre lueur" under Charlemagne did not reappear until Francis I. The apogee, he pretty clearly indicates, was the age of Louis XIV.

There is no word upon the Old French or the Middle French writers. He begins with the Renaissance and with Ronsard. The latter author is losing his reputation, since the influence of savants has yielded to that of women.⁴ As for Rabelais, Montesquieu cannot enjoy him. His gaiety may be admirable, but his naïve badinage fatigues at length,⁵ "Je ne l'ai jamais pu goûter." Montaigne's gaiety is as good,⁶ and his excellence has a wider range. These lines are applied to him—

"His fancy and his judgment such :
Each to the other seems too much."⁷

Again : "Dans la plupart des auteurs, je vois l'homme qui écrit ; dans Montaigne, l'homme qui pense."⁸ And Sorel notes that not only does the one Gascon love the other and rank him among the four great poets ;⁹ but "il s'en délecte, il s'en nourrit et, par moments, il le ressuscite."¹⁰

Among the romances, we have first philippics against the *Amadis* and its tribe. As contrasted with Homer, their uniformity is wearisome and disgusting, their combats long, their events heavy, nothing is impassioned and nothing is inevitable.¹¹ Scarron, concerning whom he tells a pretty little story,¹² has created a truly

¹ Brunet, *loc. cit.*

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 48.

² VII, 127.

⁸ VII, 162.

³ *Sup.*, p. 84.

⁹ VII, 171.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 31. Cf. *sup.*, p. 88.

¹⁰ *Mont.*, p. 11.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 47.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 35-6.

⁶ *Ibid.*

¹² *P. & F.*, 263.

ridiculous character in Ragotin,¹ and the *Roman comique* is admirable as Rabelais for gaiety.² The *Princesse de Clèves* seems to please him, in that he speaks familiarly of the characters and discusses their psychology.³ But his only sure admiration along this line is for *Manon Lescaut*, to whose protagonists much may be forgiven for the *motif* of love.⁴ His editor here notes⁵ that this lately published judgment confirms Sorel's "ingenious hypothesis" that *Manon* should have appealed to the President, and *Manon* alone among the fiction of his time.⁶ Fortage, in commending Montesquieu's opinion on the novel as "ce jugement ferme et sûr qu'il portait sur toute chose," lays emphasis, one hardly sees from what authority, on his general taste for romances.⁷ Sorel again⁸ seems nearer the mark in affirming that "les romans que l'on publie en son temps, délayés, sans observation, sans style, le détournent de la littérature d'imagination;" just as "la versification terne, froide et machinale des contemporains le détourne de la poésie,"

Coming to the great dramatists, there is no lack of respect for Corneille, he who surpassed the Cardinal in genius, he who forced the Academy into fair criticism and acknowledgment of what was due to him.⁹ Between him and Racine a choice is difficult. There are ten or twelve tragedies of these two "qui ne permettent jamais de décider : celle que l'on voit représenter est toujours la meilleure."¹⁰ Both are no longer liked, since the exercise of a great mind has grown ridiculous.¹¹ Both perhaps, if Racine is the other author, inspired the *Sylla et Eucrate*—

"J'étais jeune, et il fallait être bien jeune pour être excité à écrire par la lecture du grand Corneille et par la lecture de cet auteur qui est souvent aussi divin que lui."¹²

Yet, for distinction, he tells the Queen of England that Corneille was regarded as the greater mind and Racine as the greater

¹*P. & F.*, II, 21, cf. *sup.*, p. 91.

²*P. & F.*, II, 47.

³*P. & F.*, II, 103.

⁴*P. & F.*, II, 61.

⁵*P. & F.*, II, 541.

⁶*Mont.*, p. 21.

⁷*Ed. Hist. vérít.*, p. xii.

⁸*Loc. cit.*, cf. *sup.*, p. 110.

⁹*P. & F.*, II, 50 ; cf. *sup.*, p. 52.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹¹*P. & F.*, II, 33. Cf. on Ronsard and *sup.*, p. 128.

¹²*P. & F.*, I, 35.

author.¹ Or again, the lines of Corneille are pompous and those of Racine are natural, *though*² the former wrote easily and the latter *avec peine*.³

Racine, *per se*, has known the restraint of modern manners and “n'a pas osé montrer Astyanax.”⁴ Jansenism, which “a fait un furieux tort à la Muse de M. Despréaux,” has made the glory of Racine in *Esther* and in *Athalie*; for he drew from the movement, not theological discussion, but a perception and use of the grandeur and poetry of religion.⁵ *Phèdre*, with its horror, crime, and filial pain, yet moves and pleases. “Ce sont les accents de la nature qui causent ce plaisir ; c'est la plus douce de toutes les voix.”⁶

Molière, distinguished both for *plaisanterie* and gaiety,⁷ has had the advantages of the precursor. He⁸ has used up all the great types.⁹ Hence it is all the more difficult for Destouches and Marivaux to approach him.

The classical dictator is severely scored.¹⁰ Not only has he proved himself a pedant by his worthless satire on women,¹¹ not only has Jansenism, turning into dogmatism, spoiled his poetry, but his coarse pride, his “mauvais naturel,” his frequent repetition of the same satirical traits are “afflicting.” He has “un coeur corrompu et un esprit qui ne sert pas assez bien le coeur.”¹² His imitations of the ancients have caused it to be believed that he has more *esprit* than genius, but Montesquieu thinks from his sterility that he has more genius than *esprit*. This, however, is a mere paradox which the President immediately qualifies by allowing Boileau's creative genius :

¹ VII, 184.

² In making a contrast of the two statements (“on ne divinerait pas”), may one not see a certain blindness to the deeper constituent art of poetry—the *ars celare artem*?

³ VII, 140.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 56.

⁶ V, 193-4.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 48.

⁸ This is not stated specifically of Molière, but the application is evident for most of the types.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 21. The list is given *sup.* p. 114.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 52-3.

¹¹ Cf. *sup.*, p. 118.

¹² Cf. *sup.*, p. 128.

"Son Lutrin est un poème parfait : il se maintient perpetuellement contre la bassesse et la stérilité de son sujet par la richesse de l'invention.¹ Il n'y a point d'ouvrage qui ait été plus difficile à faire que celui-là, et peut-être n'en avons-nous pas de plus parfait. *Nec erat quod tollere velles.*"

The ancients are not his models, and he walks by their side with equal step.² Among his immortal works are this *Lutrin*, the *Art poétique*, "son épître (*sic*) à M. de Valincour."

Voiture has *plaisanterie* and no gaiety ;³ he is an "esprit fin ;" with his *finesse* and affectation, he turned letter-writing from its pedantic to a worldly tone.⁴ With regard to La Rochefoucauld, there is the fine saying that his *Maximes* "sont les proverbes des gens d'esprit,"⁵ La Bruyère is "un honnête homme qui fait des *Caractères*." He and the other portraitists should make pictures and not likenesses, should paint men and not one man, to avoid the imputation of ill intention.⁶ La Bruyère knew his century, being, however, less of a *philosophe* than some.⁷ Balzac is the chosen example of pedantry in the epistolary style.⁸ As for Retz, there is more life in his *Mémoirs* than in Caesar's *Commentaries*.⁹ Bossuet receives only this doubtful tribute—

"Dans les *Maximes des Saints*, le vrai est si près du faux que vous ne savez où vous en êtes. Le rôle de M. de Meaux était aisé : il avait de grands coups à frapper."¹⁰

The *Télémaque* of Fénelon is an "ouvrage divin . . . dans lequel Homère semble respirer."¹¹ Saint-Evremond, like St. Augustine, combats with words and has his spirit confined within the limits of an antithesis.¹²

For the philosophers, Montesquieu shows much admiration for Descartes, even to the extent of borrowing his vocabulary.¹³ If

¹ The reconciliation will then be in attributing the sterility to the whole conception, the fecundity to its parts.

² He best disproves his own argument against the moderns, cf. *sup.*, p. 127.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 47.

⁵ VII, 162.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 49, cf. *sup.*, p. 87.

⁶ *P. & P.*, II, 24–5, cf. *sup.*, p. 87.

⁷ E. g., than Duclos to whom Montesquieu happens to be writing and whom he naturally desires to compliment (VII, 367).

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 49.

¹¹ VII, 158 ; cf. *sup.*, p. 49.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 51.

¹² VII, 127 ; *P. & F.*, II, 51.

¹⁰ *P. & F.*, II, 53.

¹³ *Automate*, I, 463.

Descartes too can be accused of plagiarism, exclaims our author, we must have come to a pretty pass.¹ As early as the Bordeaux Academy *Discours*,² respect is demanded at large for those systems in which principles were developed, in which “on découvrit ces méthodes si fécondes et si générales.” People still work only after these great philosophers; and present discoveries seem only a homage to them.³

Specifically, Descartes’ system followed absolutely is improbable.⁴ Yet Montesquieu, in distinguishing between the *cartésiens rigides* and the *cartésiens mitigés* who have abandoned their master’s rule, will himself cast his lot with the former.⁵ And he thus rhetorically renders his tribute :

“Ce grand système de Descartes, qu’on ne peut lire sans étonnement ; ce système qui vaut tout ce que les auteurs profanes ont jamais écrit ; ce système qui soulage⁶ si fort la Providence, qui la fait agir avec tant de simplicité et tant de grandeur ; ce système immortel, qui sera admiré dans tous les âges et toutes les révolutions de la philosophie, est un ouvrage à la perfection duquel tous ceux qui raisonnent doivent s’intéresser avec une espèce de jalousie.”

Descartes is like a runner’s coach, who may not go all the way himself, but spurs on the other to arrive.⁷ And, in the finest phrase of all, a phrase which has been applied to Bacon : “Descartes a enseigné à ceux qui sont venus après lui, à découvrir ses erreurs mêmes.”

Among his followers, much is made of Malebranche, who is another of the four great poets,⁸ who typifies the literary treatment of dry subjects :⁹

“Si le Père Malebranche avait été un écrivain moins enchanteur, sa philosophie serait restée dans le fond d’un collège, comme dans une espèce de monde souterrain.”¹⁰

He is often cited. His system is finished, and though it may subsist only by its novelty where its extraordinariness would kill it, yet “jamais visionnaire n’a eu plus de bon sens que le père Malebranche.”¹¹

¹P. & F., II, 11.

²In 1717.

³VII, 8.

⁴VII, 28.

⁵At least for the *Observations sur l’Histoire naturelle* (VII, 47–8).

⁶Note already his fine compression in choosing words.

⁷P. & F., II, 493.

⁸VII, 171.

⁹Cf. *sup.*, p. 83.

¹⁰VII, 81.

¹¹P. & F., II, 493–4.

There are Cartesians who have read only the *Mondes* of Fontenelle.¹ "Cet ouvrage est plus utile qu'un ouvrage plus fort, parce que c'est le plus sérieux que la plupart des gens soient en état de lire."² Fontenelle has no gaiety.³ He carried on the epistolary style of Voiture,⁴ with more of knowledge, intelligence, philosophy.⁵ For this personal character Montesquieu has the warmest admiration. He is "autant au-dessus des autres hommes par son coeur qu'il est au-dessus des hommes de lettres par son esprit."⁶ Consequently concerning the *Lettres galantes du chevalier d'Her . . .*, "je suis enragé de voir un grand homme écrire comme cela." Our author writes him to ask help for a deserving man and assures him, "je ne sache rien à vous dire de plus seduisant pour vous." His loftiness of aim silences envy, a passion from which he himself is remarkably free.⁷ In argument he is ingenious if not always solid.⁸ Montesquieu and Mme. Tencin strive to dissuade him from publishing his comedies, the former with the complimentary flourish: "il faut que votre réputation soit bien grande, puisque vous ne devez pas même publier des ouvrages admirables."⁹ After the publication, however, the President writes more flatly to Guaseo that he had advised Fontenelle not to *vider le sac* and "l'impression de ses comédies n'a rien ajouté à sa réputation."¹⁰ His *Eloges*, however, on the Czar and Newton are considered worthy enough to be sent to Vienna, in order to give to Prince Eugene and others a "bonne opinion de notre France."¹¹

Another Cartesian who is esteemed is the Cardinal de Polignac. This person's *Anti-Lucrèce* is called an "ouvrage admirable,"¹² an

¹ VII, 82.

² Though he continues by asserting that a work should not be judged from its lightness of style, cf. *inf.*, p. 154.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 49.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 49.

⁴ Cf. *sup.*, p. 141.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 54.

⁷ "M. de Fontenelle a toujours eu cette qualité bien excellente pour un homme tel que lui : il loue les autres sans peine."

⁸ *A propos* of a discussion which the two had concerning the impurity of bodies, *P. & F.*, II, 507.

¹¹ VII, 221.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 54.

¹² *Voy.*, II, 47.

¹⁰ VII, 445.

“ouvrage immortel dans lequel Descartes triomphe une seconde fois d’Epicure.”¹

Bayle has gained glory by the easiest road—that of destructive criticism.² He is vigorously attacked in the *Esprit des Lois* as having insulted all religions and especially as having *flétrî* the Christian faith.³ “Il est étonnant que l’on puisse imputer à ce grand homme d’avoir méconnu l’esprit de sa propre religion.” Which imputation, however, is quite successfully made.⁴

En plein dix-huitième, the first place must be accorded to Voltaire, between whom and Montesquieu little love was lost. If the Patriarch allows that our author has restored its titles to the human race⁵ and calls his work the “Code de la raison et de la liberté,”⁶ on the other hand he endorses Mme. du Deffand’s famous *mot* on the *Esprit des Lois*—“c’est de l’esprit sur les lois”⁷—and endeavors in numerous instances to detract from its writer’s fame.⁸

The President has given good exchange for such compliments. “Voltaire a trop d’esprit pour m’entendre.”⁹ It is of him that Montesquieu declares, “le bon esprit vaut mieux que le bel esprit.”¹⁰

Several pages, in the *Pensées et Fragments* are devoted to a lively excoriation of the Patriarch.¹¹ The more the *Ligue*¹² seems to be the *Aeneid*, the less it really is the *Aeneid*. Montesquieu even goes into a detailed criticism of a certain couplet in this poem

¹*P. & F.*, II, 61.

²*P. & F.*, II, 483, cf. *sup.*, p. 121.

³v, 125–6. This passage has been used in support of Montesquieu’s own faith. It seems rather an atonement, or a sop to Cerberus.

⁴There are two readings here, of which that given above only seems the milder.

⁵*Dial. d’A, B, C*, VI, 675.

⁶*Comm. sur l’E. L.*, V, 444.

⁷*Dict. phil.*, II, 40.

⁸Cf. Sakmann *passim* and *inf.*, pp. 181–2.

⁹vII, 397—“Tous les livres qu’il lit, il les fait; après quoi il approuve ou critique ce qu’il a fait.” Cf. M’s denunciation of such manner of criticising, *sup.*, pp. 52–3.

¹⁰vII, 419—And this *esprit* is a “vice de plus”—*P. & F.*, II, 60.

¹¹*P. & F.*, II, 58–60.

¹²That is, the *Henriade*. Cf. *sup.*, p. 107 on epics, where it is probably the *Henriade* that is ruled out—as Meyer thinks, ed. *L. P.*, p. 123.

and suggests how he would have written it. The *Charles XII*¹ has one fine passage, but “l'auteur manque quelquefois de sens.” Again :

“Voltaire n'est pas beau ; il n'est que joli. Il serait honteux pour l'Académie que Voltaire en fût ; il lui sera quelque jour honteux qu'il n'en ait pas été.”

But as far as his present vogue goes, the *voltéromanie* is “trop fort pour faire son effet.” Voltaire believes in attraction, as one believes in miracles, because it is an extraordinary thing, and he is anxious to show his readers prodigies, in order to “vendre son orviétan.” As a whole, his works are like those ill-proportioned faces which shine with youth. He will never write a good history, because he writes for his convent. In his tragedies, he walks in gardens, where Crébillon marches on the mountains. It is doubtful which have best done him justice, those who have given him a hundred thousand praises, or those who have given him a hundred blows with a stick. As a general, he takes *goujats* under his protection. His imagination requires assistance.² “Gardez-vous de mourir le martyr de vos anecdotes, ni le confesseur de vos poésies.” Here is the bitterest word of all, quoted by Vian³ from the Bernadau *ms.* and worthily suppressed :

“C'est l'homme du monde qui dit le plus de mensonges dans le moins de temps possible.”

Finally, Montglave⁴ has excellently summarized the reciprocal attitude of these two great luminaries :

“Ils s'accusaient tous deux d'avoir trop d'esprit et d'en abuser, et tous deux avaient raison.”

From their relations, Montesquieu would hardly be disposed to feel very much more kindly toward Buffon, with whom, however, he came more rarely *aux prises*. He speaks coldly of the *Histoire naturelle* as unfavorably received by the scholars, whose preponderating voice “emportera, à ce que je crois, la balance pour bien du temps.”⁵ It is true that the work contains some beautiful

¹ Which is “toujours dans le prodige, étonne et n'est pas grand.” vii, 162.

² Cited *sup.*, p. 81. ³ *Hist.*, p. 202.

⁴ *Notice in Dauthereau*, ed. L. P., I, xxviii.

⁵ vii, 329,

things and, by common consent, makes very useful reading. In an Academy *éloge*, which he thought to deliver on Buffon, our author becomes, as in duty bound, more complimentary :

"Ces grandes conceptions, dans cette manière hardie, noble et fière, qui ressemble si bien à celle de Michel-Ange."¹

La Motte receives favorable comment, particularly for his tragedy of *Inès de Castro*; which touched the critic himself, and is the example chosen to illustrate the power of true feeling unworthily ridiculed.² "J'ai bien vu qu'elle n'a réussi qu'à force d'être belle, et qu'elle a plu aux spectateurs malgré eux." La Motte has many critics but none who could write the least of his works.³ It may be that his fame as a *prosateur* has harmed the reputation of his verses. In the Quarrel,⁴ he played rather an undignified part, being dragged into details by Mme. Dacier, evincing neither a large grasp, nor the necessary sentiment, nor knowledge of antiquity.⁵ In general he should be considered :

"un enchanter qui nous a séduit par la force des charmes. Mais il faut se défier de l'art qu'il emploie. Il a porté dans la dispute ce génie divin, ces talents heureux, si connus dans ce siècle-ci, mais que la postérité connaîtra mieux encore."⁶

In the drama, much admiration is displayed for Crébillon, he who "marches on the mountains."⁷

"Nous n'avons point d'auteur tragique qui donne à l'âme de plus grands mouvements que Crébillon ; qui nous arrache plus à nous-mêmes ; qui nous remplisse plus de la vapeur du Dieu qui l'agit."⁸

He puts his auditors in a transport as of Bacchantes, and prevents them from judging, because he disturbs the reflective soul. To this tribute is added, in another version,⁹ that he is the true tragedian of the time, the only one who can excite the true passion of tragedy : *la terreur*. Montesquieu professes his sincere admiration and respect for *Catalina*, the reading of which delighted him

¹P. & F., I, 267.

²P. & F., II, 56, cf. sup., p. 83.

³P. & F., II, 57 ; cf. sup., p. 121.

⁴Cf. sup., p. 127.

⁵P. & F., II, 30.

⁶P. & F., I, 224.

⁷Cf. sup., p. 37.

⁸P. & F., II, 57-8.

⁹VII, 161.

so much that he found no fault up to the fifth act.¹ He submits his opinion with deference, as being no *connaisseur* on the theatre ;² but different hearts are made for different styles of drama, and “le mien en particulier est fait pour celui de Crébillon, et comme dans ma jeunesse je devins fol de Rhadamiste, j’irai aux petites-maisons pour *Catalina*.³” The character of this hero seems to him the finest on the stage—still on the principle of *de gustibus*.⁴

Of other plays, the *Esope à la Cour* of Boursault inspired our author, he says, to be better⁴—a moral effect which he would also plead for La Motte’s *Inès*.⁵ The *Mère confidente* of Marivaux is likewise recommendable for its “admirables moeurs.”⁶

Boulainvilliers⁷ and Dubos,⁸ in so far as their historical ideas conflicted with those of the *Esprit des Lois*, are brought to task in passages of some length. The first has missed the capital point in his system, has written without art and with simplicity.⁹ He had “plus d’esprit que de lumières, plus de lumières que de savoir.” Yet his knowledge is not to be despised. The second¹⁰ has written a seductive and artful work, a colossus whose feet are of clay. There is a lengthy attempt to bring his system to the ground. In that he supposes almost an absolute monarchy in ancient France, “cet homme ne voyait jamais dans cette histoire qu’une pension.”¹¹ However :

“Le public ne doit pas oublier qu’il est redevable à M. l’abbé Dubos de plusieurs compositions excellentes. C’est sur ces beaux ouvrages qu’il doit le juger, et non pas sur celui-ci.”¹²

The allusion here is probably to the *Réflexions sur la poésie et la peinture*, by which Dubos is more generally known. But concerning this work, whose interest for his aesthetic theory would be decidedly more prominent, the President has nothing specifically to say.

¹ VIII, 314.

² Cf. *sup.*, p. 113.

³ Follows the passage on the impressionist’s prerogative, cf. *sup.*, p. 53.

⁴ *P. & F.*, I, 21.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 56.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 61, cf. *sup.*, p. 114.

⁷ *Mémoires historiques sur l’ancien gouvernement de France*.

⁸ *Etablissement de la monarchie française*.

⁹ V, 432.

¹⁰ V, 483–498.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 56.

¹² V, 498.

Of all the contemporary versifiers, Montesquieu criticises only J.-B. Rousseau.¹ He has “feu et fiel.”² His epithets express much and even too much.

“L'illustre abbé de St. Pierre,” who is always proposing projects for the good of humanity,³ is yet reprimanded for his scheme to make the nobles engage in commerce.⁴ But he deserves to be called “excellent” and the President would become his follower.⁵ This is one proof of our author's capacity for judging moral merit and high service—the man as distinct from the work. Another such piece of evidence is found in his estimate of Rollin :

“Un honnête homme a, par ses ouvrages d'histoire, enchanté le public. C'est que le coeur y parle au coeur ; c'est l'ami des hommes qui parle aux hommes. On sent une secrète satisfaction d'entendre parler la Vertu. . . . C'est l'abeille de la France.”⁶

This Ste-Beuve thinks a correct statement and a “louange mémorable” ;⁷ a “parole d'or et qui montre combien la vraie supériorité est indulgente.”⁸ Upon which it may be remarked that it is harder to be indulgent to equals, and that test Montesquieu has not always stood.⁹

There remains the *Encyclopédia*. The promoters of this enterprise made persistent efforts,¹⁰ during his lifetime and after, to include our author among their adherents ; but he could never be reckoned as hand and glove with their *Cénacle*. He indeed contributed for them the *Goût*. He writes d'Alembert that the great work is “un beau palais où je serais bien curieux de mettre les pieds,” respectfully declining, at the same time, to contribute articles on Democracy and Despotism.¹¹ He compliments that

¹ Though he urged Piron's suit for a pension with the Pompadour : “Madame, Piron est assez puni pour les mauvais vers qu'on dit qu'il a faits ; d'un autre côté, il en a fait de très bons. Il est aveugle, infirme, pauvre, marié, vieux,” etc. (vii, 408).

² *P. & F.*, II, 54-5.

³ *P. & F.*, II, 55.

⁴ IV, 390.

⁵ I, 102.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 61.

⁷ *C. de L.*, IV, 467.

⁸ *Ibid.*, VI, 271.

⁹ Cf. *sup.*, p. 124 and p. 144.

¹⁰ *E. g.*, d'Alembert, *Eloge*, p. xxxiii.

¹¹ VII, 421—On the plea that “l'esprit que j'ai est un moule,” etc.—quoted *sup.*, p. 15.

writer on his *Discours préliminaire*: “c'est une chose forte, c'est une chose charmante, c'est une chose précise, plus de pensées que de mots, du sentiment comme des pensées et je ne finirais point.” Concerning Diderot nothing is said.¹

Passing to Italian literature, Montesquieu modifies his former statement² as to the fixity of the language and the standard usage of good authors, by declaring that there is no one book which can serve as model:³

“Chacun écrit à sa manière . . . pourvu que l'on mette les paroles italiennes, les tours sont indifférents.”

He hardly mentions the great trio of the *trecento*, merely alluding to proportionate penalties which suggest the *Inferno*.⁴ Ariosto, the incomparable,⁵ seems his chief admiration. This poet is twice compared with Ovid, for rapidity of movement,⁶ and in that he collected and unified the chevalier tales, as Ovid did with fables.⁷ The remarks on Machiavelli are interesting from the fact that the Italian publicist has been considered a precursor of the French. Machiavelli was prejudiced and “full of his idol.”⁸ Montesquieu, though he has no objection to adopting a maxim from this “grand homme,”⁹ calls him severely to task where he fails to distinguish between the nature and kinds of governments:

“C'est le délire de Machiavel d'avoir donné aux Princes pour le maintien de leur grandeur des principes qui ne sont nécessaires que dans le gouvernement despote, et qui sont inutiles, dangereux et même impraticables dans le monarchique. Cela vient de ce qu'il n'en a pas bien connu la nature et les distinctions : ce qui n'est pas digne de son grand esprit.”¹⁰

The Italian drama receives but slight regard. They do well to have only Polichinelles and Arlequins, since “ils ne peuvent pas avoir mieux.”¹¹

¹ Maupertuis is mentioned for his *Essai de Philosophie morale*: “c'est l'ouvrage d'un homme d'esprit, et on y trouve du raisonnement et des grâces.” (vii, 329.)

² Cf. *sup.*, p. 130.

³ *Voy.*, I, 94-5.

⁴ vii, 171, 479.

⁵ vii, 163, cf. *sup.*, p. 131.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 45.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 47.

⁸ Considered to be the Duke of Valentinois—v, 414.

⁹ III, 231.

¹⁰ Barckhausen, *Mont.*, *l'E. L.*, p. 29. This passage, from *E. L.*, Bk., III, 9, was suppressed in the current text.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 5.

Spanish literature receives only one reference ; but that is capital and famous. He says of *Don Quixote* :

“ Le seul de leurs livres qui soit bon est celui qui a fait voir le ridicule de tous les autres.”¹

This is quite in accord with the eighteenth century contempt for chivalry and mediævalism.

For Portuguese, he praises Camoëns, whose poem on the discovery of India “fait sentir quelque chose des charmes de l’Odyssée et de la magnificence de l’Enéide.”²

There is much more concerning English authors, to whom Collins³ holds that our author owes a great deal, rather as “indirect indebtedness.” This critic’s opinion as to Montesquieu’s familiarity with the language and his degree of acquaintance with English men of letters⁴ is substantiated by Vian,⁵ who, however, claims that he knew Pope and Swift. This last point may prove significant.⁶

The celebrated discussion of the English character in the *Esprit des Lois*⁷ is terminated by some serried remarks on their literature :

“ Le caractère de la nation paraîtrait surtout dans leurs ouvrages d’esprit, dans lesquels on verrait des gens recueillis, et qui auraient pensé tout seuls.”⁸

Their satires would be *sanglants*, more in the style of Juvenal than of Horace. Their historians would not be dominated by fear, but would be prejudiced by faction. Their poets would have rather “cette rudesse originale de l’invention, qu’une certaine délicatesse que donne le goût”⁹—rather the force of Michelangelo than the grace of Raphael.

Their originality, so strongly insisted upon, approaches, for the President, to singularity, when they will not imitate even the ancients whom they admire,¹⁰ and from whom they are so far

¹ I, 262.

² IV, 461.

³ *Mont. in England*, p. 363.

⁴ Cf. *sup.*, p. 130.

⁵ *Hist.*, pp. 124–5.

⁶ Cf. *inf.*, p. 189.

⁷ IV, 343–56 ; cf. also the *Notes sur l’Angleterre* (VII, 183–196).

⁸ IV, 356.

⁹ Cf. *sup.*, p. 45—Indeed, their writings as a whole would show “plus d’esprit, que de goût” (IV, 354).

¹⁰ VII, 169 ; cf. *sup.*, p. 50.

removed.¹ They are credited with great imaginative force.² It is remarkable that their barbarous language can contain such pretty things.³

There is found the same debate between the spirit's free admiration of striking genius and the hesitation of the *raffiné*, in the criticism of individuals; of Shakespeare, for instance, who receives what is probably the fairest French classic eulogium:

“Quand vous voyez un tel homme s'élever comme un aigle, c'est lui. Quand vous le voyez ramper c'est son siècle.”⁴

The friend of Chesterfield would also thus explain Shakespeare's habit of giving “foolish” speeches to women:⁵ to make women talk well, knowledge of the world and of the *bienséances* is needed; while book-learning will suffice to provide harangues for heroes.⁶

Milton is probably alluded to as participating in the “rudesse originale de l'invention.”⁷ His religion must be considered a fiction to make his epic take.⁸

Addison and his *Spectator*, with which Collins⁹ would have Montesquieu familiar, is pretty clearly imitated in passages of the *Lettres persanes*.¹⁰ There are also other allusions.¹¹ Pope, whose system our author is accused of following,¹² has the honor of being the only participant in the Quarrel who felt the grandeur of Homer.¹³ The dramatists, concerning whom the writer probably knew very little, are categorically disposed of:

“leurs pièces ressemblent bien moins à des productions régulières de la nature, qu'à ces jeux dans lesquels elle a suivi des hasards heureux.”¹⁴

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 31.

² Especially for inventions (*P. & F.*, II, 182).

³ *P. & F.*, II, 31.

⁴ *P. & F.*, II, 48.

⁵ The heroines are directly called *sottes*.

⁶ VII, 184, *sup.*, p. 114.

⁷ IV, 356.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 19. He is again referred to, IV, 207; and is likened to Giulio Romano, VII, 163.

⁹ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁰ Cf. *inf.*, p. 189.

¹¹ V, 378; VII, 347.

¹² VI, 117, 143-4, 154. Cf. *P. & F.*, II, 484. M. seems to endorse the “Whatever is right,” if not the natural religion doctrine.

¹³ VII, 158; *P. & F.*, II, 29-30.

¹⁴ VII, 169.

It seems indeed that the bulk of the President's knowledge and appreciation was rather for the more solid writers of English, than for that nation's stock of *belles-lettres*, pure and simple. Collins¹ is right in affirming that "to our poets, he seldom refers," whether or not he is equally safe in stating that "we had nothing to teach him in style and in the art of composition."²

Among the "heavy" authors whom Collins signalizes as of special value to Montesquieu are Hobbes, Sidney, Harrington, Burnet and Echard, Stowe's *Survey of London*, Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, and travellers in large number, to nearly all of whom, in fact, there are references or allusions.³ With Locke he was "intimately acquainted,"⁴ a statement which, without going into details, any student of the sources of the *Lois* will fully substantiate.⁵ Locke is directly mentioned in connection with his fondness for flattery,⁶ is quoted with deference and called the great instructor of mankind.⁷ More, "qui parlait plutôt de ce qu'il avait lu que de ce qu'il avait pensé," and Harrington, in his *Oceana*, did not satisfactorily dispose of the personal equation.⁸

He rather distrusts Bolingbroke. "Je ne me souciais pas d'apprendre la morale sous lui."⁹ This philosopher writes with warmth but is too iconoclastic.¹⁰ Warburton, who treated Bolingbroke severely, whose review of the latter's philosophy is allowed to contain some fine things, along with others more "imaginaires,"¹¹ is addressed and complimented directly for his "magnifiques ouvrages" and his defense of the natural religion.¹² Similar fine speeches are made to Hume, who had the kindness to send a criticism of the *Lois* and his *Inquiry Concerning the Human Under-*

¹ *Loc. cit.*

² Cf. *inf.*, p. 189.

³ Other such names, who are held to have produced "livres bien écrits" are Bangor, Tillotson, Praats (*sic*)—*P. & F.*, II, 33.

⁴ Collins, *Ibid.*

⁵ Especially for the separation of powers. See Oncken, Fuzier-Herman, Koch, Pietsch.

⁶ II, 101.

⁷ I, 31; II, 298.

⁸ V, 414; cf. *sup.*, p. 53.

⁹ *P. & F.*, II, 165–6.

¹⁰ VII, 432.

¹¹ *P. & F.*, II, 63.

¹² VII, 431–3.

standing—“qui ne peut partir que d'un esprit extrêmement philosophique.”¹

As for Shaftesbury, he is the fourth of the great poets.²

8.

TECHNIQUE—STYLE.

The root of the matter is approached by the President in what may seem an undecided and even a timorous way. He is not sure about all the things that ought to count; but he is quite certain about some things that ought to count, and is equally positive that some other things should never count.

Is the expression in itself the main thing? Or, more mildly, has the matter of style a considerable importance? It is in beating about these questions that our author shows wavering.

A significant passage in which he lays down broadly the principles that he will adopt, is the following:

“Un homme d'esprit est, dans ses ouvrages, créateur de dictions, de tours et de conceptions; il habille sa pensée à sa mode, la forme, la crée par des façons de parler éloignées du vulgaire, mais qui ne paraissent pas être mises pour s'en éloigner. Un homme qui écrit bien n'écrit pas comme on a écrit, mais comme il écrit.”³

This then is the secret—individuality without exaggeration or affectation, a subtle skill that is not too evident,⁴ distinction and superiority without unpleasing presumption.

On the other hand, Montesquieu pleads for simplicity;⁵ and there it is easy to overreach oneself. He approves the book of Boulainvillers as written “sans aucun art”⁶ and in connection with laws, which should be written with simple reason rather than

¹ VII, 321, 327. It must be said, though, that Hume is mildly rebuked when he attacks the church, and that Montesquieu writes with equal warmth, of his character at least, to a third party (VII, 435).

² VII, 171.

³ P. & F., II, 7; cf. sup., p. 54. ⁴ Cf. the *ars celare artem*, sup., p. 42.

⁵ VII, 140.—“Une des choses qui nous plaît le plus, c'est le naïf; mais c'est aussi le style le plus difficile à attraper”—because it is just between the noble and the bas; cf. sup., p. 43.

⁶ V, 432.

with artful logic or rhetoric, he observes for general application that, “l'expression directe s'entend toujours mieux que l'expression réfléchie.”¹ This perhaps may be meant only for purposes of clearness; for elsewhere he allows that a style may be studied, that we learn how to write in the silence of the workshop.²

As to the importance of form, it is true that he seems to slight it, in showing easy indulgence to the critics who would change his expressions,³ as in asking a correspondent to judge “même sur les fautes de style.”⁴ The worth of a work cannot be judged by its style; because “souvent on a dit gravement des choses puériles; souvent on a dit en badinant des vérités très sérieuses.”⁵

Yet he has recognized how much the sciences, for example, gain by being treated “d'une manière ingénieuse et délicate.”⁶ Those very laws which require simplicity do not thereby eliminate style—they even require other of its qualities, such as concision and majesty.⁷

What is really troubling the President is that he falls into the very common confusion between style and ornament, instead of regarding the one as the texture and the other as the finish. As just seen, he has not insisted upon the interweaving of matter and manner; he is apt to regard the warp and woof of discourse as a question of mere rhetoric, which may be laid on or not, from the outside—according to one's fancy. From the outside, too, this is naturally the thing most readily discerned and appropriated. And since he is strong in his condemnation of unsupported rhetoric, he is naturally not sure about style, tending to view it as a facile and suspicious sort of technique. That is why he can insist, as has been seen, that the subject is the all important thing,⁸ and why he felicitates himself, in the *Temple de Gnide*,⁹ that his description is

¹ v, 403, 405.

² *P. & F.*, II, 10, cf. *sup.*, p. 125.

³ VII, 273. But cf. *sup.*, pp. 121–4.

⁴ VII, 273.

⁵ VII, 82.

⁶ VII, 81.

⁷ v, 403, 405. But they are too often, especially the mediæval monuments, “puériles, gauches, idiotes; elles n'atteignent point le but; pleines de rhétorique, et vides de sens, frivoles dans le fond, et gigantesques dans le style.”—(v, 258) Or else, “froids, secs, insipides et durs” (v, 437).

⁸ Cf. *sup.*, p. 87.

⁹ II, 9.

“non pas un ornement du sujet, mais une partie du sujet même” and that “les ornements de son poème en sont aussi des parties nécessaires.”¹ That is why he is able to penetrate the connection between simplicity and majesty.² That is why, too, he is in doubt as to whether or not he likes a lofty style. A work of philosophy would be a “bel ouvrage,” almost equal to the Koran,³ if it were adorned with high and sublime words, mingled with bold figures and mysterious allegories.—

“Cependant, s'il te faut dire ce que je pense, je ne m'accommode guère du style figuré. Il y a, dans notre Alcoran, un grand nombre de petites choses, qui me paraissent toujours telles, quoiqu'elles soient relevées par la force et la vie de l'expression.”⁴

The “figured style” is clearly out of place “dans une narration qui doit être aisée.”⁵

Montesquieu's detailed remarks on style will naturally deal from his conception of the subject rather with its superficial and rhetorical aspects, than with its more intrinsic and impalpable elements. He has much to say about ornament, declamation, antithesis and the like, and less to say about qualities or kinds.

Continuing his remonstrances against ornament, he objects with equal strength to the “fleurs” which Livy threw upon the “colosses d'antiquité,”⁶ as well as to those with which Quintus Curtius covered Alexander.⁷ He dislikes, in Voltaire, the pretentious and the *recherché*.⁸ Modern preciousness is not always true delicacy;⁹ a *saillie* is hardly to blame because it wounds the

¹ Here, by a curious twist, he would seem himself to advocate the idea that style, considered architecturally, is a question less of decoration than of intrinsic construction, and that the former must spring from the latter. This is of course broadly true. But the danger is that, by a bold leap, skipping style, he has made the *rapprochement* between the *matter* and the ornament. Which hardly clarifies the problem. A reference to his initial paragraph, to his own ideas of individuality, distinction and artistic creation, may show what just here he has missed.

² v, 403.

³ Cf. *sup.*, p. 133.

⁴ I, 312.

⁵ *Mél. in.*, p. 48.

⁶ II, 150.

⁷ *P. & F.*, II, 46-7. The first author is looked upon askance as a *déclamateur*, the second as a *rhéteur*.

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 58.

⁹ VII, 346. *À propos* of translating the Bible, where these *délicatesses* are out of place.

direct vision of a geometer;¹ but it shines to advantage only in its proper setting:

"Les traits saillants ne doivent être que sur les tissus d'or: ils sont puérils quand le sujet est puéril."²

Most decided are his deliverances against rhetoric and bombast. "Le style enflé et emphatique est si bien le plus aisément," etc.³ Just this sort of style makes the "ouvrage d'ostentation;"⁴ and ostentation characterizes rhetoric and oratory,⁵ while it should be absent from a narrative of plain action.⁶

The King Cambyses' vein is not difficult to acquire:

"Le talent de la déclamation est le plus commun de tous; les jeunes gens qui veulent écrire commencent toujours par là."⁷

Oriental "expressions sublimes" may "bore" (*sic*) even to the clouds.⁸ Elaborate figures and exclamations are derided in the Academy.⁹ Such things are not the true language of the Graces. "Ces froides exagérations," far from honoring a mistress, rather dishonor "le fade passioné qui les met sans cesse en usage."¹⁰ Worst of all, rhetoric and poetry may show the use of ignoble arts, such as flattery.¹¹

The qualities¹² of style upon which Montesquieu lays stress are not exactly those which the rhetorics usually recommend. Elegance or beauty is not distinctively mentioned. Force finds its recipe in imaginative vividness;¹³ excessive strength is perhaps criticized in the "style hardie" of the Greeks.¹⁴ Clearness is not expressly commanded, unless simplicity and the "expression directe" imply this. Facility of perception, however, and economy of attention are general requisites for the soul.¹⁵

¹I, 397.

²P. & F., II, 13.

³VII, 176—quoted *sup.*, p. 43. *Emphase* leaves even Venus cold (VII, 469).

⁴V, 403. ⁵VII, 171. ⁶IV, 434. ⁷P. & F., I, 216. ⁸I, 52.

⁹I, 247—quoted *sup.*, p. 101. ¹⁰VII, 464–5. ¹¹V, 488.

¹²Hardly to be distinguished from the qualities of Literature, cf. *sup.*, p. 86., and again under Art, *sup.*, p. 35.

¹³"Donner des images bien sensibles fait la force," P. & F., II, 31.

¹⁴P. & F., II, 30. But tragedy "a besoin de force," P. & F., II, 6.

¹⁵VII, 124–5. Cf. *sup.* p. 43.

More specifically, he would have one learn “à écrire avec ordre, à raisonner juste et à bien former ses raisonnements.”¹ In this connection, he insists once more upon *suite*.² Monotony is wearisome : “le même ordre des périodes, longtemps continué, accable dans une harangue,”³ and variety itself has a vicious tendency to become uniformity, as illustrated in the antithetical style—“le tour de phrase, toujours le même et toujours uniforme, déplaît extrêmement.”⁴

Concision is a quality which he lauds in Suetonius,⁵ in d'Alembert,⁶ and in the law of the Twelve Tables.⁷ “Lorsque la chose dit tout, il ne faut point de nouvelles paroles.”⁸ He seems to prefer the *vers serrés* of the Latin.⁹ Brevity or length, however, really depends upon the nature of the subject to be treated. “Il est vrai qu'il y a des occasions où la beauté de la pensée consiste dans la brieveté.”¹⁰ For example, in epigrams, and in close reasoning. But in descriptions or in the expression of passions, wordiness is in a way required.¹¹ In the former case :

“On ne saurait trop écarter le superflu : toute parole, toute idée inutile est pernicieuse, parce que l'esprit, la croyant importante, se fatigue ou se dégoûte.”¹²

Word-painting, on the other hand, or psychological analysis would naturally be *parleur*, to express adequately the number of things seen by the eye or felt by the heart—as well as to impress the fact that the spirit “a vu une infinité de choses qu'ils n'avaient pas su distinguer.”¹³ He posits here one colleague of concision, which is suggestiveness ; and he indicates one enemy, which is clearness. All of these qualities are accounted for, and a golden mean suggested, in the following passage :

“Pour bien écrire, il faut sauter les idées intermédiaires, assez pour n'être pas ennuyeux ; pas trop, de peur de n'être pas entendu. Ce sont ces suppressions heureuses qui ont fait dire à M. Nicole que tous les bons livres étaient doubles.”¹⁴

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 10.

² Cf. *sup.*, p. 86.

³ VII, 123.

⁴ VII, 127, cf. *sup.*, p. 38. ⁵ VII, 129.

⁶ VII, 421.

⁷ V, 403. For laws generally, “le style en doit être concis.”

⁸ *P. & F.*, II, 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45 ; cf. *sup.*, p. 86.

¹² On which he comments “Rendre plus clair.” In fact, it would seem that the principle of nebulous suggestion, touched on in the quotation, finds root more readily in concision than in its opposite. Cf. next page.

¹³ *P. & F.*, II, 14.

This is somewhat his idea of mystery.¹ He applies connotation to words, declaring that a large word implies a large thought.² Thereanent, he mentions onomatopeia, as in *trinquer*.

In regard to harmony, though the Academy is perhaps too insistent upon this point,³ Montesquieu considers it of importance, and believes that he himself has mastered its secret :

“ Bien des gens en France, surtout M. de la Motte, soutiennent qu'il n'y a pas d'harmonie. Je prouve qu'il y en a, comme Diogène prouvait à Zénon qu'il y avait du mouvement en faisant un tour de chambre.”⁴

Diction is also a matter that demands consideration. One may say whether or not a word is French, but whether or not it is a ‘good word,’ provided it does not go against grammar, depends upon “l'usage qu'un homme d'esprit en pourra faire.” For he is the arbiter of his usage, the creator of his diction.⁵ Our author comments at length upon the effect of single words, in passages from Rousseau and Ovid.⁶ Word value, one may gather, is especially prominent in epithets and epigrams. Still, from a practical and particularly from a legal standpoint :⁷

“ Les paroles ne forment point un corps de délit ; elles ne restent que dans l'idée. La plupart du temps elles ne signifient point par elles-mêmes, mais par le tondont on les dit. Souvent, en redisant les mêmes paroles, on ne rend pas le même sens ; ce sens dépend de la liaison qu'elles ont avec d'autres choses. Quelquefois le silence exprime plus que tous les discours. Il n'y a rien de si équivoque qu'à tout cela.”⁸

Coming to figures, we have heard him reprehend that sort of style,⁹ and reprimand the forty heads of the Academy as “toutes remplies de figures, de métaphores et d'antithèses.”¹⁰ Comparisons, which should show a climactic order,¹¹ should progress within the same class : the comparison should be made between a

¹ Cf. *sup.*, p. 41.

² *P. & F.*, II, 9. The suggestive example given is : *stylocératohyoidien*.

³ I, 248. Quoted *sup.*, p. 101.

⁴ *P. & F.*, I, 33.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 7, cf. *sup.*, p. 54.

⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 15–16, 41 ff.

⁷ In connection with the counting of “indiscreet words” as forming the crime of *lèse-majesté*.

⁸ IV, 80.

⁹ I, 312. Quoted *sup.*, p. 155.

¹⁰ I, 247.—Cf. *sup.*, p. 101.

¹¹ “Où l'esprit doit toujours gagner et jamais perdre.”—That is, in greatness, or in fineness and delicacy.—VII, 140–1.

manner and a manner, an action and an action, rather than between disparate things.

For climaxes also transpositions are allowable, particularly in poetry.¹ The order of things, it is true, sometimes counters the order of expression.²

Most important, in connection with his own application, are the remarks on antithesis.³ It will be found, with some surprise, perhaps, that these are generally of a derogatory turn. The beauty of the antithesis is a “beauté d'opposition,” and he distinguishes clearly enough between the false and the true kinds:⁴

“On peut remarquer ici combien est grande la différence des antithèses d'idées d'avec les antithèses d'expression. L'antithèse d'expression n'est pas cachée ; celle d'idées l'est ; l'une a toujours le même habit, l'autre en change comme on veut ; l'une est variée, l'autre non.”⁵

But an antithesis is a narrow thing,⁶ and it is the false and easy class which so often recur, when the opposition is against *bon sens*, or is common and trivial, or is too *recherchée*.⁷ In such cases, the figure causes no surprise and is displeasing and defective. The antitheses should be in a work by nature and not by force ; “car pour lors la surprise ne tombe que sur la sottise de l'auteur.” His “vicious uniformity”⁸ is found not only in the fine arts, but in authors like St. Augustine⁹ and Saint-Evremond, who contrast the beginning and the end of their sentences in continual antitheses.¹⁰

“Le tour de phrase, toujours le même et toujours uniforme, déplaît extrêmement ; ce contraste perpétuel devient symétrie, et cette opposition toujours recherchée devient uniformité. L'esprit y trouve si peu de variété que, lorsque vous assez vu une partie de la phrase, vous devinez toujours l'autre ; vous voyez des mots opposés, mais opposés de la même manière ; vous voyez un tour de phrase, mais c'est toujours le même.”

Descriptions, it has been seen, should be intimately connected

¹ *P. & F.*, II, 12.

² *P. & F.*, II, 43.—But he has insisted, in connection with surprise, upon climactic arrangement. Cf. under Art, *sup.*, p. 41.

³ A derivative of the great principle of contrast, cf. *sup.*, p. 40.

⁴ While quoting and praising Florus as exemplifying the right kind.

⁵ VII, 138–9. ⁶ *P. & F.*, II, 51. ⁷ VII, 140. ⁸ Cf. *sup.*, p. 38.

⁹ Also quoted disparagingly for this fault, *P. & F.*, II, 13.—Cf. *P. & F.*, II, 51.

¹⁰ VII, 127.

with the subject, not “étrangères et recherchées.”¹ And so for episodes in general. Other such *hors d'oeuvres* may find place here, for instance digressions, of which he says :

“Je vois des gens qui s’effaroucheut des digressions ; je crois que ceux qui savent en faire sont comme les gens qui ont de grands bras : ils atteignent plus loin.”²

A preface, which seldom sins by being too short,³ is a very tiresome thing,⁴ as is also a dedicatory epistle. For the sake of variety, he will dedicate his work to those who will not read him.⁵

¹ II, 9, cf. *sup.*, p. 86.

⁴ I, 53.

² VII, 173.

⁵ *P. & F.*, II, 177.

³ I, 458.

BOOK IV.

DISCUSSION OF DOCTRINE.

CHAPTER XVI.

CRITICISM OF DOCTRINE.

In discussing the doctrine, those points only will as a rule be taken up which have not already been submitted in the presentation, as immediate explanation or essential linking.

Considering first the division on Art¹ in general, some comment on Montesquieu's view of the term, its content and significance, seems advisable. His initial discrimination² between the industrial and the fine arts, and the emphasis laid on the former, gives at once his point of view. Art is a human phenomenon which the wise statesman will allow for. He will even study its manifestations disinterestedly, without *élan* or rapture, guided by the rules to which long experience has attained and by the promptings of a nice taste. He will judge it chiefly for its pleasure-giving capacity, and thereby for its indirect but basic utility.

The point of pleasure³ is certainly well taken, if the word is made broad enough in its implication and high enough in its quality, if he means the intellectual delight, the finer emotional responsiveness set in vibration by a true perception of true art. But if he means *all* pleasures of any kind, what shall we say? One may allow the extension to *fantaisie* and perhaps to *volupté*⁴—but how with the declension to amusement and *agrément*?⁵ With due respect for the importance of an appeal, for which the word

¹ *Sup.*, pp. 20 ff.

² P. 20.

³ P. 21. From this point on, the words *supra* and *infra* will generally be omitted, when the reference is clearly to the present work.

⁴ P. 22.

⁵ P. 23. It may be remembered that even Buffon arranged his classifications to be "agreeable."

'interesting' is now a frequent cloak, and certainly without taking a false step on treacherous moral grounds, it may still be remarked that the President could easily have added a little more loftiness to his conception of Art. The notion that its first purpose is to be pleasing and amusing, without explicit and essential reference to either truth or beauty, is likely first of all to lead to a disproportionate sense of values. The big things may no longer be held the best, the most needful; and *ressorts* good and harmless enough in themselves, such as wit, excitement, gallantry, actuality, "story-telling," may become startlingly obtrusive.

This our author realized well enough for items like *esprit*, however much he may have inclined his ear in the doing.¹ It should also be said that his conception admitted of the higher and ultimate pleasure that may spring from pain. Else why choose terror as the true passion of tragedy.²

Having made poorer pleasure the goal, he proceeds, humanly enough, to doubt whether that is sufficient. The statement that we would be miserable without the arts is the cultural plea.³ Yet he is afraid that they are small tastes,⁴ coming by way of compensation. If they are truly needs—and the argument is insidious—they have thereby an evident use. The question of utility,⁵ though he would reject it, is disturbing him throughout, and openly or indirectly he refers the matter to that standard in the last analysis. There is a hierarchy higher than art. At best, he passes from the economist's viewpoint to that of the wise and universal legislator, who believes that art is a more or less pleasant and dangerous thing, to be watched, controlled and approved where it operates for the good of the state.⁶

With regard to special points, one may applaud his insistent principle of relativity, whether as causing the subjectivity of appreciation and production,⁷ whether as of abstract qualities,⁸ or as sanctioning the divergences of taste.⁹ This gainsays iron standards, and means tolerance, catholicity, individualism. But here there is hedging. If his suggestion of the comparative method

¹ Cf. *inf.*, under Application, p. 189.

² P. 115.

³ P. 24.

⁴ P. 27, note 5.

⁵ P. 24 ff.

⁶ Especially in connection with *luxe*, p. 27.

⁷ P. 29.

⁸ P. 35.

⁹ P. 46.

tends similarly to good in that he would erect no scale,¹ if there is more in heaven and earth than is dreamt of in the classic rules,² if he is disposed to admit great genius, visible and overweening, as the arbiter³—yet in the main and for the large majority, classicism is a tolerably safe procedure; and the remonstrance against rulers is usually a remonstrance against rules as critically applied to himself.

Similarly restricting the individual is Montesquieu's implicit reference of the question to his other standard of socialism, his dimly expressed belief that it is the greatest good of the greatest number that counts. Catholicity maintains the many more properly than the one; and a centered individualism might mean a worse despotism than the classic, in that it would be a misrule. Yet we may thank his strong and searching mind for more faith in the new type, in the individual right, than could well be expected of his age.⁴

For the other kind of classicism, his worship of antiquity, sincere and helpful as it was, is not always admirable. It is clearly not ancient art that he knows and loves;⁵ nor is it the most antique antiquity. “Il ne connaît jamais beaucoup cette première antiquité, simple, naturelle, naïve.”⁶ Faguet⁷ has indicated, with kindly touch and most favorable interpretation, the ancient ideal of the President :

“Il y a une antiquité d'une certaine espèce, non point fausse, mêlée seulement d'un peu de convention, et vraie d'une vérité dramatique et oratoire, une antiquité faite de la naïveté de Plutarque, de la noblesse de Tite-Live, et des regrets de Tacite, et des colères de Juvenal, et des grands cris des Stoïciens qui met dans l'esprit des lettrés un idéal excellent et précieux de vertu austère, de simplicité hautaine, de frugalité un peu fastueuse, d'énergie et de constance infatigables,” etc.

¹ P. 33.—Remembering that he did not grasp or rightly value the total method, that he gives but a bare superficial catalogue of likenesses, with no dexterous transferal of vocabulary, or reciprocal setting off of qualities—to which last, however, his principle of contrast should tend.

² P. 52.

³ P. 53.—For Corneille or Homer, not for Shakespeare or Voltaire.

⁴ Of which perhaps the most forceful expression is the Chapter on Uniformity (v, 412–13, and *sup.*, p. 52).

⁵ Faguet, *XVIII^e siècle*, p. 146.

⁶ Ste.-Beuve, *C. de L.*, vii, 43,

⁷ *XVIII^e siècle*, p. 147.

For closer judgment, it would be necessary to add Montesquieu's slight acquaintance with the Greeks, his admiration for Cicero and Florus.¹

The relations of art with climate² seems excellently and moderately set forth, allowing a little more for the slower and deeper expression of the North. It would seem best, too, to allow the national character as an intermediary ground, rather than to pass at once from physical dispositions and sensibilities, as efficient causes, to artistic product as effect. But Montesquieu's general tendency, as a budding sensationalist, was to make too much of 'nerves' and 'fibres' and our physical organs.³ Hence, thinks Lanson,⁴ he has the right to be hailed as a precursor, he is constituting a psycho-physics, "qui détrônera les classiques études d'immaterielles opérations d'une âme indépendante de ses organes." It is doubtful, however, if the President may be credited with so weighty an honor. He is hardly sufficiently explicit and thorough-going.⁵

As to nature,⁶ one may heartily approve his principles of discovery and selection. He is no naturalist, no believer in indiscriminate presentation. The "imitating" is rather a vague and weak watchword, deprived of what specific sense it may once have had. The idea that art should improve on nature—in so far as such improvement implies addition as well as subtraction and arrangement—can hardly be allowed. Nature is not the malleable material that a Le Nôtre would make her. We can hardly expect much reverence for her in Montesquieu's age, when she was regarded as a serviceable and unobtrusive hand-maid.

His appreciation of external nature⁷ was conventional and not

¹ Cf. *inf.*, under Literature, p. 181. ² Pp. 29–30.

³ P. 28. He shared this with other aestheticians. *E.g.*, Villate, in his *Gout*, makes harmony dependent on the "jeu de nos organes" (p. 277).

⁴ *Rev. univ.*, p. 394.

⁵ Dubos seems the real precursor. His chapters concerning the influence of the physique and of climate may have given ideas both to M. and to Villate; cf. Brunetièr (*Ev. de la crit.*, p. 144).—"Montesquieu, qui doit beaucoup, aussi lui, à l'abbé Dubos, a oublié de s'en souvenir;—et il s'est contenté de le réfuter." Cf. *sup.*, p. 147.

⁶ P. 30.

⁷ P. 31.

keen. D'Alembert believes him "accoûtumé à étudier la nature," but Helvétius doubts this strongly.¹ And Doumic notes that in the *Voyages* there is no care shown for the mountains or for Naples—"le charme ou l'horreur d'un paysage le laisse insensible."²

For art's qualities, the reproach that the *Goût* is too abstract is hardly the worst that could be made against it.³ Montesquieu has usually been condemned rather for a lack of philosophy, of principles and leading standards, than for an excess thereof. Surely he is not wrong in seeking the qualities which should characterize artistic production.

He may, however, be wrong in his choice and valuation of these properties. One may be ready to accord the importance of variety, contrast, novelty and the like, while making more than he is disposed to do of the primary elements—beauty and sentiment.⁴

Perhaps he takes beauty for granted, or holds it too impalpable for more than summary treatment and appreciative recognition. Perhaps he considers, what is nearer the truth, that it is the *primum mobile*, from which the lesser qualities evolve,⁵ and so receives its indirect tribute through them. At any rate there is found little more than an uncritical admiration of what is "beau," there is made manifest no intimate and intrinsic sense of the beautiful as a necessary dominance. He does not say what beauty is, but what it is not.⁶ He even recommends a sort of hidebound, common beauty, compact rather of classic regularity than of individual charm.⁷

This seems deficient. So do his remarks on sentiment, which likewise is not posited as the essence.⁸ It is allowed in connection with taste,⁹ but his basic conception of it is either cold and physical, or else affected and suggestive of the dawning eighteenth century sentimentality.

¹ Mont., *Oeuvres*, ed. Didot (Parrelle), I, 25.—"Ses ouvrages ont-ils ce caractère ? et son caractère le menait-il là ?"

² Rev., p. 928, cf. *inf.*, p. 167, note 8. ³ Saintsbury, quoted *sup.*, p. 35.

⁴ Cf. with his list (p. 35, *sup.*), that of Gérard (*Goût*, p. 2)—the 'sentiments' of novelty, sublimity, beauty, imitation, harmony, the ridiculous, and virtue.

⁵ Among which are the "idols" of Ste.-Beuve's suggestion—p. 36.

⁶ P. 46. ⁷ P. 36.

⁸ P. 37. He gives it more place under Literature, cf. *inf.*, p. 179. ⁹ P. 44.

That he practically omits morality need not cause any disturbance.

His views on variety as versus uniformity, on symmetry and order, seem good, if not startlingly new.¹ Especially is he to be congratulated on seizing the great principle of contrast, in its broadest and minutest applications.² What is sometimes considered a happy accident or a dependent phase in artistic theory is here exploited as an important *ressort* for values and interest. This is significant in the light of his own practice.³

Surprise, connected therewith, is hardly so well conceived,⁴ and while the *je ne sais quoi* itself demands attention when saluted by a Frenchman,⁵ the content of his "associated ideas," is not so happy.⁶ Expense and difficulty are neither suitable objects for suggestiveness, nor charming inhabitants of the border land of mystery.⁷

After his appreciation of an antiquity, comparatively simple if not primæval,⁸ we might expect some considerable admiration of *naïveté*. In fact, the President is delighted with the *naïf*, wherever he finds it.⁹ You may picture him adoring a Dresden shepherdess or playing in Trianon pastorals. He would be simple above all things. But unfortunately, as he has expressed it,

¹ P. 38.

² P. 39.

³ Cf. *inf.*, p. 191.

⁴ Brunetière (*Ev. de la crit.*, p. 89), connects the care for this with a leaning towards even less admirable *ressorts*—"Emphase ou Préciosité, ce que ces deux défauts de l'esprit et du style ont de commun entre eux, c'est de chercher dans la surprise où dans l'étonnement, qu'ils confondent avec l'admiration, le principe de la beauté."

⁵ Saintsbury ridicules this—"The *je ne sais quoi*, in an attractive, but not technically beautiful girl is, it seems, due to surprise at finding her so attractive, which, with all respect to the President, seems to be somewhat 'circular.' " (II, 514).—Cf. *inf.*, p. 175.

⁶ P. 43.

⁷ Gérard (*Goût*, p. 6 f) recommends a moderate difficulty in the performing—and considers excessive simplicity displeasing.

⁸ Cf. *sup.*, p. 163.

⁹ P. 43. In literature, it is what allures him in the classics, especially in the 'Fable.' Faguet reproaches this "idéal un peu convenu, un peu *livresque*, de simplicité voulue, de pureté et d'innocence dans les moeurs," as tending towards the easy and superficial optimism reprimanded in the President. (*XVIII^e siècle*, p. 156.)

"comment peut-on travailler à être naïf?" Thence his forced contentment with the "simplicité voulue."¹

His first definition of taste is bad, in that he makes it the criterion of pleasure rather than of beauty.² But he has finely phrased the characteristics of "natural" taste. The division into two kinds seems necessary and fairly stated, only he does not consider that a taste may be so excessively "acquired," as to be artificial and *faussé*. The choice of France's cultured courtiers as the arbiters of æsthetic elegance³ can hold good, as he later very well divines, only for a certain kind of elegance. Were it not for his final recognition of popular standards,⁴ his reference of all things to "têtes frisées" and the like would be a quite preposterous claim. One wonders if the change was dictated by some such remark as that of Helvétius, who comments on "on trouve à la cour une délicatesse de goût."

"Oui, s'il le regarde comme un défaut ; car tout ce qu'il dit prouverait que ce goût doit être peu sûr. Hors la nature, y a-t-il un goût sûr et vrai?"⁵

The attempt has already been made to reconcile his two apparently opposing views.⁶

Montesquieu *voyageur*, Montesquieu the critic of fine arts has been the subject of judgments as widely different as that of Fourrier de Flax, who would have us use him as a guide-book, "des plus précieux et des plus spirituels,"⁷ against Faguet, who holds him no artist or æsthetician at all.⁸ The "enchantement" on which the former writer insists becomes, he thinks, a "révélation complète" at Florence and Rome. Montesquieu is "enchanted"

¹ Cf. *inf.*, p. 201.

² P. 44.

³ P. 45.

⁴ P. 47.

⁵ *Loc. cit.*, I, 188.

⁶ Pp. 46-7. For his definitions, cf. Villate (*Goût*, p. 235), who is strikingly close to M.—"Le Goût délicat est un discernement exquis, que la nature a mis dans certains organes, pour démêler les différentes vertus des objets qui relèvent du sentiment."

⁷ *Voy. de Mont.*, p. 9.

⁸ "Voyage tout intellectuel . . . où le méditatif n'est nullement divertie par l'artiste, où la réflexion n'est nullement interrompue par le spectacle d'un monument ou d'un paysage" (*XVIII^e siècle*, p. 149).—The last point is well taken, and to pardon the absoluteness of the first, one may remember that it was uttered before the publication of the *Voyages*.

to such a point "qu'il établit les règles du dessin et même celles de la sculpture." The perusal of these rules, one might suggest, is very likely to disenchant the reader. The eulogist himself is contradictory as to the President's valuation of antique art, declaring at one moment that we could desire no better guide therefor, and at the next that he is *accaparé* only by the Renaissance. This is his domain, in which he appears "comme un maître, un inspiré, un révélateur." Montaigne shows unfavorably in contrast and the Président de Brosses as well.¹

The point regarding Montaigne had already been made by the editor² of the *Voyages*. As for Brosses, a glance at the *Lettres* will show quite as much regard for things Florentine, a lesser appreciation perhaps of Michelangelo, though quite as large for Raphael.³

The writer in the *Revue historique* voices an equally strong admiration of Montesquieu's æsthetic deliverances,⁴ attributing to him "une connaissance parfaitement au courant de toute la technique des arts et s'intéressant en architecture aux procédés de construction autant qu'à l'effet artistique des monuments."⁵ Bonnefon,⁶ too, credits him with "ideas,"⁷ with thoughtfulness and discernment, and with feeling present, though ironically repressed. Cantù, laying more stress on our author's social and economic observations, apparently thinks few of his artistic utterances worth culling.⁸

Of all these, Bonnefon seems nearest the mark and Fournier de Flaix farthest from it. The President has doubtless some things of interest to say, and shows knowledge and appreciation along

¹ Fournier de Flaix, *Voy. de Mont.*, pp. 9-12.

² Barckhausen, who likewise believes in Montesquieu's "passion" for the fine arts, claims that some of his judgments are "astonishing," and that he felt much, even when he would not express. (*Voy.*, I, xxI, xxxIV).

³ Brosses, *Lettres*, I, 240; II, 63 ff.

⁴ And an equally unconscious and significant side-light on his "procedure" in architecture.

⁵ *Rev. hist.*, LIX, 130.

⁶ *Rev. d'Hist. litt.*, II, 129.

⁷ Coming—which is important—"par la comparaison."

⁸ *Nuova Antol.*, 1894, 567-72.

certain lines ; but it would be a grave error to regard him either as a competent *vademecum* or a catholic critic. He frequently misses the right points—and where he hits them, his expression is apt either to be conventional and pedestrian, or venturesome on the side of technique, or most frequently, a matter of mere information presented in a statistical way. He is still the collector of facts, the compiler of curious details not immediately relative to artistic values.

Still, certain of his preferences and inferences are worth remarking. First there is his feeling for the Italian¹ Renaissance,² especially as expressed in Raphael and Michelangelo. He may be credited here with true discernment, however acquired, with a right sense of the forceful and of the sweet, of the spiritual and of the Cyclopean ; and many divagations may be allowed to a taste, which has seized and balanced these contrary matters. There is present perhaps a feeling for line rather than for color—to color he seems not acutely sensible, as shown in his comments on Titian and the Venetian school.³ There is present also a tincture of the conventional, a prepossession always hard to overcome in regard to such popular idols as Raphael. This becomes more conspicuous in his appraising of the Bolognese school,⁴ where he defers completely to the reigning canons.

It is not difficult, remembering that modern reversion may also be a fad and modern “historical” estimates too preponderant, to condone his ignorance of the Pre-Raphaelites and even his scorn of the Primitives. But making all allowances for the period and its prejudices, his abuse of the Gothic⁵ is surely intemperate and unreasoned. It accords ill with his principle of taking a work *per se*. ‘Gothic’ is with him simply an equivalent term for barbarous, and this while he is forced to concede the religious appositeness of the style and its actual beauty in certain of the churches.⁶ His notions as to its historical meaning and development are certainly original.

¹ Not the French, which he scarcely knew.

² P. 57 ff.

³ P. 61. He had a nicer eye for discrimination in attitude and drawing.

⁴ P. 57.

⁵ P. 71 ff.

⁶ Pp. 72-3.

In connection with the religious relations of art, his remarks on these¹—drawn from his acquaintance either with the Greek statues of deities or with the churchly studies of the Renaissance—seem quite justified as a matter of history, whatever one may consider the *a priori* connection. He does equally well in admitting the virtual Greek origin of the arts.²

For painting particularly, he is open to the same reproach which has been applied to his conception of literary style:³ he confuses manner with mannerism, and in seeking to suppress the latter, he goes far toward suppressing the distinctiveness and individuality of the former.⁴ If we concede, as we may, that ornament is not true beauty, what shall we do with the statement that only great simplicity is true genius?⁵ May genius not be rather *simplex munditiis*? Otherwise, what becomes of art?⁶

One has hardly begun to sympathize with his distrust of realism,⁷ when disconcertment comes with his attack on *vaghezza*,⁸ in apparent opposition to his recommendation of such qualities as charm, sentiment, mystery. The importance which he attaches to *chiaroscuro*⁹ is interesting as derivatory from his principle of contrast. In every branch he has seized upon light and shadow as a fruitful motive.

There is much relativity and thoughtfulness in his notion of not taking the Greek physique as the ideal for to-day.¹⁰ But as a whole, he has little feeling for sculpture, evinces the amateur's smattering, shows small delight in the antique masterpieces and takes Bernini seriously.¹¹ His conception of architecture, as dependent absolutely upon the old Vitruvian dogmatic orders, as physical or mathematical and always strictly invariable, reveals

¹ P. 58.

² Pp. 59, 72.

³ Cf. on genius *versus* art, p. 81, and *inf.*, p. 183.

⁴ P. 60. Cf. his condemnation of ornament in architecture (p. 72). This, however, is good, as is also his recognition of the prettiness and powerlessness of Versailles.

⁵ P. 72.

⁶ Cf. *inf.*, p. 172.

⁷ *Sup.*, p. 30,—p. 60.

⁸ Which, however, he may conceive of as nearer sentimentality (p. 61).

⁹ P. 61.

¹⁰ P. 67.

¹¹ Though he dislikes his *frappant* and likes its absence in Raphael. Cf. Ornament.

him in his most classic frame of mind.¹ Indeed, what with his adherence to these tasteless proportions and his denunciation of the Gothic, he shows to less advantage on the building art than on any other.

In choosing Italian music and Italian operas, it may be claimed that he chose the best of which his time was capable.² The love of that opera shows at any rate a love of the romantic and melodic, if also of the spectacular and the facile—and he can hardly be blamed for not preferring a Beethoven, when a Beethoven did not yet exist. Still, he expresses a desire for the higher harmony as against superficial elaborateness, thus again opposing the greater simplicity and ornament. The strictly moral effect which he claims for music must be questioned. His account of the subject and his arguments are alike somewhat flimsy.

For landscape-gardening,³ he seeks, with what degree of legitimacy it need not here be determined,⁴ to use nature artistically. At least, his revolt against Le Nôtre, his taste for English gardens, his protest against wearisome and excessive regularity deserve commendation. Even here he is careful to hedge. His love of nature is quite another thing.⁵

In sum, it appears that on broad lines—for evidently neither here nor elsewhere can a halt be made to approve or condemn the host of his more detailed observations—his expression on the fine arts is chiefly valuable from a temporal or historical standpoint. When he yields to the opinion of the period, as in the preference of certain schools and principles of painting or architecture, he must be noted: still more, when he departs therefrom, when his struggling individuality gropes after the new order, the future feeling for personality and protest. Or else, he is interesting when he deals, however cavalierly or conventionally, with the great questions of debate. He frequently poses, as a great mind must, thoughts that demand thought, the fruitful problems of productiveness, perfection, vision and art's recurring cycle.

Such a topic is suggested as soon as he embarks on the sea of

¹ P. 69.

² Pp. 75 ff.

³ P. 78.

⁴ Cf. *sup.*, p. 164.

⁵ Pp. 31-2.

Literature. The striking passage¹ where genius is contrasted with art, and the latter identified with "manner" indicates, even though not pushed to its logical conclusion, an intransigent attitude which must surely be reckoned with. He will not employ the usual means of conciliation, which makes genius equivalent to unconscious art. It is still farther from the excessively conscious, elaborated art, from artificial, acquired simplicity.

Simplicity, indeed, it must have, but the greatest spontaneous simplicity—a kind always recommendable, however unattainable.² And with this may be linked his cry of "imitez la nature," so far as that has not come to be a meaningless catchword, so far as it still signifies plain unimaginative truth and primary objectivism and distrust of *colifichets*.

If this is his subtle pleading, and if thereby he means to vaunt this absolute objectivism, classically or realistically stated, he is vaunting a dead letter.³ How is he completely to discard the personal equation, the temperamental basis? "Nature" is a very broad word; and one argument for impressionism would seem to be that since we cannot know "things in themselves," let us present them faithfully from our standpoint. It may be hoped that in this way we approach an ultimate "natural." At any rate it is natural to us.

The President, in fact, for all his positivism and empiricism, is troubled by the presence of the human "machine." Man seems at one instant all, at the next nothing, never an invariable object. He will express or smother himself, by no fixity of standards, but according as he finds himself in a moment of self-effacement or of boastfulness. The expression will not depend upon the will of another. Such vibration in judgment of self or the race is as old as either.

If I have read too much into the Montesquian formulae of simplicity and nature, if, as would be most probable from the moderation of his soul, he is not absolute against either subjectivity or art, he should be given a fresh hearing. Yet, as far as

¹P. 81, cf. p. 166.

²P. 43.

³As his own doctrine of relativity sufficiently demonstrates.

genius is concerned, he has certainly made the opposition—though, as before, it is a principle which he will hardly make thorough-going in application to individuals. He may be convinced, and rightly convinced, that the divine fire is supreme. But is it alone and self-sufficient, and does it disdain the aid of art? Does he himself rank Raphael and Virgil, artists both, as hopelessly out of the running with Michelangelo and Homer? Are genius and art found incompatible in Dante or in Shakespeare? The most that can be admitted is a certain decline, when art assumes too much the upper hand. In dealing with the numerous personages in these pages, artists *and* geniuses, the President slips easily away from his distinction. So far, however, as the *dictum* makes for creative power and against artificiality, it must evidently be welcomed.

One must stop likewise to applaud his principle of suggestiveness, expressed in the fine maxim that a truly great thought makes us see many others.¹ No abler statement of the true purpose of allusion, by a past master in the art, can well be found. It is a question of leaving something to the reader, of stimulating him, of "making him think."² And the just balance is struck when our author recommends the golden mean between boring and obscuring a reader, with "suppressions heureuses."³ The suggestiveness desired is neither that of the *je ne sais quoi*, nor that of allusion, topical or literary, but simply the kind that by compact and happy statement opens up vistas of associated thought.

By this and by many other such references, the things of the mind are seen to be the permanent issue with Montesquieu. Here, in connection with poetry and drama, he tries to do justice to imagination and sentiment.⁴ He really does more than might be expected. But his praise is all too brief and it may safely be inferred that these qualities had no abiding place in his regard.

His argument for the value of literature is interesting, in that he attempts to discard the notion of an immediate utility as essen-

¹ P. 81.

² P. 86.

³ P. 157.

⁴ Pp. 82-3. As in connection with art above, p. 37.

tial, throwing emphasis rather on the general cultural import.¹ The shoemaker may occasionally leave his last, and the economist his calculations. One may be glad too that he is not with those who rank letters as a decadent development. He stands for a recognition of *milieu* and believes that the best literature comes with the best ages.² He shows his tolerance and the true cosmopolitan spirit in giving us to understand that each national output and each *genre* is to be allowed and judged by its own standards.³

He is less satisfactory in ascribing the appeal of the best authors to the fact that they provide a *nouveau frisson*, that they stimulate and satisfy our curiosity or surprise.⁴ It is easy to see that curiosity has its highest meaning; yet in linking this quality with suggestiveness⁵ and in calling it the (chief) "principle of pleasure" in *ourrages d'esprit*,⁶ is he not making a little too much of a *ressort*, strong undoubtedly, but after all lying in a reader's responsiveness and hence thoroughly subjective? It has been in writing up—or down—to a reader's curiosity that some very poor stuff has been composed. That way lies ultimately sensationalism and melodrama.

The "superstition of the subject"⁷ is an open question and one on which the President is entitled to his views.

In his criticism and complaining of the influence of the *salon*, conversation and *esprit*, he unquestionably takes high ground and is apparently sincere.⁸ But it is clear from the space which he devotes to such influences in writing, that he considers them inevitable for his age and is prepared to capitulate. He does not so fully, indeed, denounce the empire of women and of conversation, except as causes, the account of these being rather descriptive and explanatory. He divided at the time what Taine perceived in later perspective and came with sagacity to much the same conclusions; to wit, that any *littérateur*, and more especially any writer in the semi-literary *genres*, such as science or philosophy, was bound to consider his audience; that this audience, composed generally of more or less ignorant though curious worldlings, and

¹ P. 83, cf. *inf.*, p. 202.

² P. 84.

³ Pp. 85–6.

⁴ P. 86.

⁵ P. 41.

⁶ P. 41.

⁷ Pp. 85 and 87.

⁸ P. 87 ff.

particularly of women, demanded to have truth brought to their level ; that these demands, consisting specifically in a call for the every-day language of conversation, general simple terms dependent on current experience and familiar examples, as opposed to a technical and abstract vocabulary, were binding upon any author who wished to be understood, to become known and popular ; that, in brief, the social status and its expression controlled expression in literature.¹

The perception of the necessity is only somewhat dimmer in Montesquieu's theory. He is more disposed to regret the facts. But his books are probably among those which Taine had in mind, as best exemplifying the method and its results.

Our author, as became the haunter of *salons* that he was, does not stop there with the women. He is perpetually bringing them in, as subjects for artistic reference, for example in connection with order,² or mystery.³ Duparcq⁴ makes a deft comparison here between the feminine *je ne sais quoi* and *pudeur*, as appraised by the President. His statement that women form taste, though it may not on the whole be gainsaid, has, it is noted,⁵ hardly proved true in his own case.

The worldly influence is chiefly to be condemned, it appears, because of its alarming productiveness in the matter of *badinage* and *esprit*. His objection here reads very much like that of Buffon :⁶

"Mettre de l'esprit partout, c'est la manie de nos jeunes auteurs : ils ne voient pas que cet esprit, à moins qu'il ne soit tiré du fond du sujet, ne peut qu'en gâter la représentation ; que semer mal à propos des fleurs,⁷ c'est planter des épines. . . . S'ils eussent formé leur goût sur de bons modèles, ils rejettteraient cet esprit étranger à la chose."⁸

But with *esprit*,⁹ Montesquieu is truly in much the same predic-

¹ Taine, *Anc. Rég.*, pp. 335–6—“Avec cette méthode, on peut tout expliquer, tout faire comprendre, même à des femmes, même à des femmes du monde.”

² P. 39.

³ P. 42.

⁴ *Notes sur Mont.*, etc., p. 68.

⁵ P. 45.

⁶ *De d'art d'Ecrire*, quoted by Nadault de Buffon, I, 293.

⁷ Cf. the *fleurs* of Livy and Quintus Curtius, *sup.*, p. 137.

⁸ Containing also the “superstition of subject.”

⁹ P. 89 ff.

ament as with its causes, his helpless protests ringing all the louder as he succumbs. In vain he solemnly declaims against the quality,¹ would prefer true intellect or true humor, denies its connection with genius, would repudiate it for himself. He is forced to admit its modern predominance and its modern hold on literature. He is himself dependent upon its exercise, knows this and naïvely acknowledges it.²

It is largely because he has *esprit* and wishes to show it that he passes in part so contemptuous a verdict upon books and authors,³ poets and critics. Many of these *portraits* are rather caricatures, and do not embody inner conviction. Yet, in his remarks against writing generally there is something of a more serious questioning, the old wearied cry, the *cui bono* of Ecclesiastes. Writing seems only commendable where there is genius; otherwise books are ordinary or bad; the distinction between works of genius and those of mere memory or erudition is made for literature in general, for science⁴ and for history.⁵ In which connection, one is tempted heartily to indorse the points he makes against the tribe of compilers and commentators.⁶

The faults and failings, the merits too, the troubles and trials of authors are not ill set forth;⁷ though still with exaggerations for effect. Personally, he seems to think little of his own performances, showing however an *ombre* of literary vanity, if much less of literary jealousy than is usual.⁸

The best writers and the best books⁹ are not included in his condemnation. No *boutade*, however sweeping, can vitiate his love of humanities, his delight in study, which is sincere, inspiring, well-reasoned.—

“Jamais les lettres . . . jamais le travail, l'étude et les livres n'ont arraché à un écrivain des accents plus sincères, un éloge plus convaincu et plus senti.”¹⁰

¹ In others.

² He has even “une sorte de point d'honneur sur l'article de l'esprit.”—SoREL, p. 11.

³ P. 93 ff.

⁴ P. 102.

⁵ P. 115.

⁶ P. 94.

⁷ P. 97.

⁸ P. 98, cf. vii, 207. (*Laboulaye*).

⁹ Though there is always debate as to the inclusiveness of the “best.”

¹⁰ ZéVORT, *Mont.*, p. 38—*à propos* of the *Discours sur les Motifs*.

His diatribes against pedantry¹ and stupid authority, against the empire of old and devitalized facts, are but another sign of his struggling individualism. The true thirst for learning is quite another thing.²

His attitude towards the Academy³ is quite normal, easily explained by his actual connection with that body. As a young *tirailleur*, he abused the institution in the *Lettres persanes*: and “l’académie se vengea en le faisant Académicien.”⁴ He seems rather to have taken to heart the advice of Malet,⁵ who received him and thus called him to task :

“Ainsi, pour être Académicien, ne croyez pas, Monsieur, n’avoir d’autre fonction que de juger ce que les autres font; et ne craignez point d’être obligé de louer ce que ne sera pas digne de l’être.”⁶

Doubtless he was *depaysé*⁷ in that immortal company of 1728.⁸ Another Academy, that of Bordeaux, which he liked a great deal better, happens to be just the institution ridiculed in the *Académistes* of St.-Evremond.⁹

Montesquieu’s estimates of philosophy and of theology are scornful and superficial.¹⁰ It seems strange that he makes so little of oratory or political eloquence,¹¹ especially, as Darest notices, that he allowed this so small a place in picturing the grandeur of Rome.¹² His admiration for Cicero would seem to tend in the other direction. But his poor opinion of the *genre* is probably due to the same cause which led him to condemn the special type of the *oraison funèbre*. It is still “la même pensée qui repoussait les ornements et tous les mensonges de la poésie.”¹³

As to this last, it is sufficiently obvious that the President had no taste for poetry,¹⁴ that is, for anything voicing the pure lyric afflatus. His attitude may be partially condoned, in view of the

¹ Pp. 100 ff.

² P. 99.

³ P. 101.

⁴ Petit de Julleville, vi, 173.

⁵ *Discours de réception à Mont.*, p. 206.

⁶ An evident retort to the “fureur panégyrique” of M’s accusation.

⁷ Zévort, *Mont.*, p. 126.

⁸ P. 111.

⁹ Bernadau, *Annales*, p. 94.

¹⁰ Pp. 103-4.

¹¹ P. 105.

¹² *L’Hist. rom. dans Mont.*, p. 14,

¹³ Meyer, *Com. L. P.*, p. 138.

¹⁴ P. 106 ff.

miserable quality of the poetic output of his time.¹ He has, however, been abundantly dealt with by the critics for this deficiency ;² and, in truth, if we allow his own very wide definition of the term, it will be seen that there are several kinds which he really esteems.

There are first the thinkers, the “four great” ones, who apparently were—especially Montaigne and Shaftesbury—poets of a rare order. They were none the less so that, like earlier Walt Whitmans, they shunned the shackles of rhyme, rhythm, harmony and the like. We have only to define poetry as prose to reach so inevitable a conclusion.

Yet something must be allowed for this view too. The *dictum* is, thinks Faguet,³ an—

“Opinion où il y a du vrai, et beaucoup d’inattendu.⁴ Il faut entendre sans doute que les plus grands poètes, à ses yeux, sont les philosophes, les créateurs et évocateurs d’idées. . . . On sent là⁵ l’homme de raison froide qui n’aura de passion que pour les idées.”

Similarly Montesquieu’s own reservation of the dramatists as the “masters of passions” is deemed by this critic a recognition of the French dramatists rather as moralists and orators.

For the two concessions to poetry made thus far, of the four great thinkers and of the dramatists, it might be objected that neither class is ordinarily esteemed as poetic of necessity or primarily ; and again that our author, far from valuing the specific provinces mentioned, has shown an utter abhorrence of philosophers, of moralists and of orators. M. Faguet would probably explain, as indeed his context implies, that philosophy and morality are used in the broadest sense ; that Montesquieu seems to him, as indeed he would seem to anybody, to value chiefly thinkers and dealers with ideas, which need not be technically philosophical or

¹ This is Sorel’s excuse, *Mont.*, p. 21. But cf. Hémon, *Cours de litt.*, I, 9.—
“Mais ses jugements sont trop particuliers au temps et au goût du temps.”

² I, 41 (Laboulaye) ; Faguet, *XVIII^e siècle*, p. 141 ; cf. *inf.*, p. 203.

³ *Loc. cit.*

⁴ Which suggests that Montesquieu was merely committing an epigram. It is not always easy to distinguish. Cf. *inf.*, p. 178.

⁵ That is, in M’s contempt for “lyric extravagance.”

moral; and that there is something to be said for thought in poetry.

Allowing then that Montesquieu was enormously fond of poetry, as exemplified in Montaigne or Cr  billon, one might further ask, with some hesitation, if he cared for any other kind. Whereupon, more exceptions may emerge. He had, it is readily granted, some sense of the beauty of classical lines; and he had, what is better, a twilight feeling for poetic antiquity.¹ With this last is connected a romantic feeling for the *riante* ‘Fable.’²

With the enumeration of these four or five exceptions, some of which are more apparent than real, I may leave substantially untouched the initial statement that the President was, on the whole, unpoetic in temperament and appreciative power. What he has to say then in criticism of the *genre* will hardly be of much value. His notions concerning “d  clamation” and the necessary dactyls of English verse³ are not very informing. One may however, abundantly approve his desire to disassociate poetry from dogma.

He had of course nothing like the modern familiarity with fiction, knowing only the *roman* of long adventures and prodigies, together with the few specimens of the psychological, or the novel of manners, which had then appeared. There is little to take issue with in his philippics against the first class,⁴ or in his appreciation of Scarron and Mme. de La Fayette.⁵ For the latter kind, especially for *Manon*, the passionate quality impresses him remarkably—more than any study of character. He has nothing to say concerning the semi-philosophic oriental tale⁶—which indeed he is held to have inaugurated.⁷

His warmth of feeling for the drama⁸ must give us pause. It seems a zeal quite laudable, if not thoroughly according to knowledge. Hennequin would have him “p  n  tr   de l’  tude des tragiques grecs.”⁹ Yet he recognizes only terror in tragedy.

¹ Sorel, p. 21. Cf. *sup.*, p. 125.

² P. 113.

³ P. 109.

⁴ P. 111.

⁵ P. 139.

⁶ As typified by Voltaire or by *Rasselas*.

⁷ Cf. *inf.*, pp. 187, 193.

⁸ Pp. 113–5.

⁹ *Etude sur Mont.*, p. 27—a dubious proposition.

How could he show a complete appreciation of dramatic excellence, after showing so little taste for the poetic and romantic? In fact, he himself admits his ignorance on matters of the theatre.

This is not altogether to deny his taste for the drama, whether he felt it as so closely linked with life, action, passion, or whether he simply leaned to a theoretical admission of the *genre*. It may be observed that his conception is highly moral and classical above all. Corneille and Racine are more admired than Molière and Shakespeare;¹ and Crébillon is adored.²

As for history,³ there is found not only the comprehensive or panoramic conception, which might be expected from the author of the *Romains*, but an understanding of the dramatic or “literary” kind, of the philosophic kind, and, most significant, of that history of the people which has been esteemed a much later growth. His sneers at memoirs⁴ seem excessive to-day, with our modern reliance upon that form of composition.

His judgments on malevolent satire⁵ merit as much praise as those on destructive criticism. Here,⁶ nearly every statement is good—whether as to the inferiority of criticism to creation, the ‘art’ of it, its dependence on the decision of the people, its due fairness to the author, its guiding task. The only reserve that could be taken is that his warning against destructiveness springs directly from a consideration of those writers who would destroy him. His remarks are none the less general in application. A discussion of his own place as a critic may best find place at the end of the treatment.⁷

His preference for the ancients,⁸ his acceptance of imitation, his belief in the decadence of the moderns, his insight into the fact that these latter have lost in sentiment as much as they have gained in philosophy and reasoning⁹—these points may pass without further comment. His evolution of the separate literatures calls for closer examination.

With the Greeks,¹⁰ he again admires decidedly more than he

¹ P. 139 ff.

² Pp. 145.

³ P. 115 ff.

⁴ P. 117.

⁵ P. 118.

⁶ P. 119 ff.

⁷ Cf. *inf.*, p. 201.

⁸ P. 124 ff.

⁹ P. 128.

¹⁰ P. 133.

knows. His praising of Homer and the dramatists has not the surest touch. Aristotle and Plato are unduly depreciated. Plutarch is liked, one would think, for his positive biographical value.

His taste for individual Latins¹ is illuminative in a way that a general adoration of antiquity could never be. Virgil appeals to his classically artistic sense; Ovid and Tibullus to his gallantry; Cicero to his sense of the grandiose and *théâtral*;² Florus—"son maître de rhétorique et ses délices,"³—to his preciosity and deftness in diction; Marcus Aurelius and the stoic feeling to his moral fibre; Livy and Quintus Curtius are condemned from his theoretical opposition to ornament.

Montesquieu's utterances on French literature are subject to similar limitations, enforced by his period or his personal bias. Delacroix is undoubtedly too severe in wishing to eliminate altogether these judgments, yet with modification his opinion will hold—at least for the *Pensées diverses*:

"Nous aurions désiré qu'on eût retranché de ses *Pensées diverses* les jugements sur les auteurs Français, parce que ces jugements ne seront jamais confirmés, ni par l'opinion publique ni par le goût. Montesquieu a beaucoup trop exalté Crébillon, et semble avoir voulu rendre à Voltaire injustice pour injustice."⁴

There is not so much to say when the President indicates a preference for the early part of the Age of Louis XIV, as perhaps marking the zenith of letters.⁵ It is natural that he should have chosen this reign and just that part of this reign, for the national taste, from the Regency on, revolted against the latter part. But it is more difficult to make like allowance, when we find no word celebrating the splendor, power, poetry and scholarship of the French Renaissance.⁶ Ronsard is not an *actualité*, which would seem to settle the question.

¹ Pp. 135 ff.

² Janet seems entirely justified in calling M's estimate of Cicero unreservedly panegyrical. "Par exemple il le loue en philosophie non seulement au-delà de la vérité, mais contre toute vérité." M. maintains the Roman's originality in philosophy and claims that he overthrew the Greeks; whereas he only translated these. The praise of Cicero's character is also quite exaggerated. (*Journal des Savants*, 1893, p. 149.)

³ Sorel, p. 52.

⁴ *Mont. consid.*, p. 37.

⁵ Pp. 28, 84.

⁶ P. 138.

The praise of Montaigne shows the preference for "ceux qui pensent" against "ceux qui amusent."¹ Boileau's art is admired—but his spirit and his character condemned.² The point of character, indeed, is what Montesquieu chiefly considers in regard to his contemporaries, admiring on this ground Fontenelle, Rollin, St. Pierre.³ The last is reproved, wherein he would work against our author's aristocratic views.

It is again the intellectual which he reveres in Descartes and in Malebranche.⁴ Voltaire, if he is not quite considered a "polisson de lettres,"⁵ is judged with acumen as well as with personal animus.⁶ And Buffon is appreciated somewhat grudgingly.⁷

The remark on the "rudesse" of English poetry⁸ is also revelatory. It counts on the credit side that he is disposed to allow to the English authors generally imagination and originality. He is caught in doubt as to Shakespeare, being better able to estimate and appreciate Pope or Addison.⁹

Just here, by way of transition to style, we may note Fréron's¹⁰ comment on the "écrits satiriques sanglants :

"En défendant les grâces contre l'énergie, l'auteur soutient sa propre cause. Mais en aspirant aux grâces françaises, il n'a pas renoncé à l'énergie anglaise."¹¹

Force, in fact, would hardly be a French recommendation, and accordingly, when it comes to style, this quality is not expressly enjoined.¹² Perhaps, again, it is because the French look upon clearness and elegance as somewhat obviously theirs, that no great stress is laid on these points either. But concision is still happily insisted upon; and the *suppressions heureuses* continue the idea of the suggestive and inspiring thought.¹³

His idea of a style at dissonance with the subject is,¹⁴ it has been remarked, quite in accordance with the tone of good society—that of saying serious things lightly and *vice versa*. But it is quite

¹ P. 138.

² P. 140.

³ Pp. 143, 148.

⁴ Pp. 141–2. And in Locke (p. 152).

⁵ Sorel, p. 137.

⁶ P. 144.

⁷ P. 145.

⁸ P. 151.

⁹ P. 151.

¹⁰ *Remarques sur l'E. L.*, p. 208.

¹¹ This is *à propos* of M's claim, "moi je suis peintre."

¹² P. 156.

¹³ P. 157.

¹⁴ P. 154.

opposed to the “tone of discourse,” the maintaining of a certain standard of expression in harmony with the subject. However, he desires to discount rhetorical traditions.

His best point, in connection with rhetoric, is where, after renouncing all its works, he allows that declamation is an usual early stage in stylistic development.¹ He thus suggests, contrary to his assumed formula, that the progress may be from simplicity, through ornament, back to a certain simplicity again. No issue can be taken with his protests against labored form, against ornateness and bombast. Only, he is apt to consider any style—say, a rich, controlled, or thought-out expression—as coming under one of these heads. He seized, at any rate, the important principle that sublimity falls easily into bathos.²

¹ P. 156.

² P. 43.

CHAPTER XVII.

APPLICATION OF DOCTRINE—CONCLUSIONS.

It may be interesting to round off the present study by an investigation of how far the foregoing principles obtained in Montesquieu's own method and style. Regard will be had of course to the evident fact that, within the limits of this discussion, it will be impossible to give an exhaustive or thorough review of his writings—qualities which have been aimed at in the presentation of his doctrine. Nor can the linking be made between any but the most important of his principles and their application.

A compendious statement of his whole literary doctrine, with an attempt to find the key of his system, so far as that can be logically coördinated, may well precede.

I should find this key, or leading principle, in his opposition of thought and amusement. The majority of his views seem derivatory from this contrast. Those that are not come from a second subsidiary opposition, allied or confused with the first, between restrained classic art and original expression.

Let us see if such systematizing will hold.

That he makes thought the main issue appears from his desire not to “faire lire, mais de faire penser,” from his exaltation of Reason as the divinest faculty, from his usual admiration of those writers who were the greatest thinkers. Works of thought are *ouvrages d'esprit*.

That he makes of amusement a main issue appears from his statement that we ordinarily read for pleasure alone, from his allowance of *esprit* and the *salon* style, of gallantry and salaciousness. Works of pleasure are *belles-lettres*.

How often does he conciliate the two motives? The lower will be subordinated to the higher, pleasure to thought. This is seen in his suggestion of researches for *savants*, “et un trait de galan-

terie" for the rest ;¹ and more brilliantly in his Invocation to the Muses to lead to wisdom and truth *through* pleasure. If he allows the means to obscure the end, both in detailed development and in execution, that will be perfectly human.

From his devotion to the supreme idea comes his view of suggestiveness in thought, akin to an appeasing of the higher curiosity, to the use of compressed diction ; thence also proceed his causal conception of history, his love of knowledge and study, his care for the spirit rather than the form of laws. Here primarily come into play his principles of order and *suite*.

His hesitancy as to pleasure, his more or less reluctant yielding to its calls, become manifest not only in frequent discussions of women, wit and gallantry, but in his opposition of truth and the *bon mot*, his view of the limits of satire and epigram. The qualities of variety, uniformity, curiosity and surprise, mystery and *naïveté*, are largely chosen because of their pleasurable appeal.

The subsidiary contrast, that between genius and "manner," or individualism and classicism, will likewise include much. His standpoint here similarly fluctuates, according as to whether or not he esteems a point of style so powerfully and reasonably classic to be indisputably good form. Otherwise genius will prevail, and art is only artificiality and emptiness.

Accordingly, he believes in a delicate literary treatment of the sciences, in a measured use of true antithesis, in using while imitating nature. But loud is his denunciation of rhetoric and figures, of hampering pedants, and of senseless, tasteless critics. Genius is its own arbiter. A work not of genius is worthless. And simple genius—to complete the cycle—is thought.

Things of a pure abstract beauty hardly concern him. Contrast and charm are the only qualities falling strictly here. Imagination and sentiment are briefly dismissed, though he will not have the latter ridiculed. Literature may be addressed to the soul ; but of his division he has chosen that type "dont le sujet consiste dans le raisonnement."

¹ Which was Bayle's excuse.

Briefly surveying his works, it will readily be seen that the principle of amusement obtained in his earlier years.¹ Reserving for a moment the *Lettres persanes*, let us consider his contributions to the art of fiction.

None of these show much narrative ability ; but they do show, each and all, a compromise with the disposition to the ornate, the elaborate, the artificial, which theoretically he so heartily rejects. The *Temple de Gnide* and the *Voyage à Paphos* were written to please a princess ; and throughout they evince the flattest concessions to the *salon* taste—which was also that of the hothouse.

The *Temple de Gnide* with its pretty conceits, its faded figures and images, its false nature and its *art suspect*, is evidently designed to satisfy the “*délicatesse de goût*” which he found at court. It has no note of real feeling, no vitality, no appeal save that of the *curiosa felicitas* and of voluptuous suggestion. Its descriptions of nature are tame and trite to a degree ; neither here nor elsewhere has Montesquieu shown vividness or pictorial power in representing the outdoor world. Its plot is rambling, revealing already its author’s lack of constructive ability. This is best excused by considering this production with the *Voyage à Paphos* as connected and incomplete sketches.

Such are the evident weaknesses of the method. Perhaps there is compensating gain. For certainly, insipid, cold and tasteless as is most of the *Temple*, it is yet *spirituel* and pleasant in places. There is some picturesque force and imagination in the account of the cavern of Jealousy, in the still-life view of the Sybarites. There is some daintily *malin* charm in the *tableaux* of the Gods, in the closing scene with Thémire—the charm of a Boucher allegory. Better than either are the fair pages of fine prose, modeled and moulded into a rigid and polished beauty, as of *beau marbre*—the still cold beauty of the perfect classic phrase.

¹ It will be impossible, from this point on, to give the host of references, authorities, studies, which contribute to the conclusions about to follow. I must ask the reader to accept results in lieu of processes, assuring him that the former have come not without much brooding over the pages of Laboulaye, as well as from the perusal of some three hundred essays and monographs on the President.

Then, too, no one can deny the presence of that harmony which he claimed for himself.¹

Céphise et l'Amour is a pretty and *provoquant jeu d'esprit*. Not so much can be said for the *Voyage à Paphos*, which is wearisome, silly and the worst of these productions. It is the apex of passionless gallantry, tribe ornament and stale mythology. In this very *Voyage* is found the rebuke of “ces froides exagérations qui . . . déshonorent le fade passioné qui les met sans cesse en usage.”² And the remark seems eminently applicable to his own production. He has also rebuked the throwing of flowers; but in these tales he throws them with both hands; and they are palpably artificial flowers.³

The principle of a lower pleasure, then, seems inadequate for literary purposes. It is interesting in this same *genre*, to compare with these stories the *Arsace et Isménie* of his later years.⁴ This tale is fully as poorly constructed, has still the *clinquant* and the appeal to the passions. But thought has now been added to amusement. There is both brilliancy and profundity in reflection, a restrained richness in style, a simpler and more interesting manner of relation. It is more nearly a philosophic apologue. The high light of humanity and idealism appearing at the end of his life shines brightly here, and—*chose étrange!*—thereby is it even given to him to display in his last story more of sentiment than elsewhere, more movement and a purer passion.

One point must be touched on, in connection with Montesquieu's avowed preference of gallantry to grossness.⁵ The first is a prime motive in all of these tales—certainly there is nothing Rabelaisian about the *Temple de Gnide*. Yet, in the *sottisier* at Bordeaux, if we may believe Vian,⁶ in the two *Lettres persanes*⁷ of the *Etrennes de la St.-Jean*, there are details quite at dissonance with his nicer theory. When it comes to gallantry, there is a coldness in

¹ P. 158.

² VII, 464, cf. *sup.*, p. 108.

³ P. 137.

⁴ The *Histoire Véritable* is too poor and awkward a story to require serious criticism. It is chiefly interesting as anticipating the *L. P.* for harem descriptions, and in some technical points of style.

⁵ P. 91.

⁶ *Hist.*, pp. 181–2.

⁷ Which, if any, are the contributions to this collection that I would assign to his pen.

his most passionate scenes that is quite repulsive. His Galateas are all statuesque and his ardors rhetorical and his transports unconvincing. The *fade* language of compliment and the vagueness of the classic vocabulary help in this effect. He is at his best in the agreeably *malin* scenes, dependent on suggestion or *rouerie*, as in the *Gnide* and in certain episodes of the *Lettres persanes*.¹

That masterpiece, “le plus profond des livres frivoles ;”² shows what is on the whole a happy compromise between the two principles. The desire to please perforse compounds with the irresistible idea, determined to have its way. “Manner,” which is now a brilliant style, and genius have found a common ground.³ Libertinism, some critics would have it, and story-telling, form but a cloak, a foil for thoughtful discussion. The last part of the book turns preponderatingly to the consideration of grave questions, social and artistic, political and economic, religious and historical : the *Esprit des Lois* is already announced.

Yet there can be no doubt that in the mind of Montesquieu, as in that of his contemporaries and in that of impartial posterity, the lighter elements, whether of the Oriental *trame*, the sparkling epigrams and portraits, the delightful tone, the perfect grace and vividness of the style, play at least as considerable a part as any doctoral discussion.⁴ What really makes the *Lettres persanes* is its brilliancy, its *esprit* in the fullest sense of the word.

¹ E. g., the story of Zuléma. This is interesting from the point of view of construction. It is properly a digression containing a tale and a tale within a tale—and none of the three are rounded off. Similarly, in *A. & I.* the reader is bewildered by the haziness and improbability of the conclusion.

² Villemain, *Cours de Litt.*, p. 332.

³ P. 81.

⁴ Stories are not lacking to illustrate that M. subsequently regretted his frivolity. He is said to have told his daughter, “Laissez cela, mon enfant ; c'est un livre de ma jeunesse qui n'est pas fait pour la vôtre.” (Vian, p. 64). Also, for his free-thinking, there is his death-bed confession, probably apocryphal but indicative, that he was moved to these utterances by “le goût du neuf et du singulier ; le désir de passer pour un génie supérieur aux préjugés et aux maximes communes, l'envie de plaire et de mériter les applaudissements . . .”—His words, according to P. Routh (Feller, *Dict. Hist.*, ix, 56). His *désir de plaire* has been condemned by critics, from Marivaux to Jullerville. As to *esprit*, Castel's state-

The reign of this quality¹ comes as supplementary to, as supplanting indeed, that of feminism. It appears in many guises: as simple brilliancy or style of statement; as epigrammatic subtlety *à la* Rochefoucauld or as more abiding apophthegm,² shading into the Orphic and the prophetic utterance; as humorous exaggeration, paradoxical in both senses, and as deft irony; as realistic drollery, colloquial repartee, even poor puns; as excoriating satire³ and biting ridicule.⁴

Just here it may be well to take account of one or two influences. That Montesquieu's Persians get some of their points from the *Spectator* has been pretty clearly shown,⁵ and I think in like manner, a striking analogy may be traced—whether or not an influence may be predicated—between the Dean of Dublin and the President, between the *Lettres Persanes* and *Gulliver's Travels*.⁶ This is apart from the argument that the Frenchman's later theory of the separation of powers derives largely from Swift's *Discourse of the Contests*.⁷ That contention, plausible though dangerous as all such speculations are, would, however, if sustained, help forward the present argument.

All that is now submitted is that there are distinct analogies, in conception and satiric treatment, between the points of view ascribed to Gulliver and to the Persians. There is the same perfectly straightforward and almost serious handling of very familiar European things as from a foreigner's naïve standpoint. There is the same realism of detail, the same jocose appreciation of what would strike the foreigner as remarkable. Few French-

ment, that M. wished to obliterate his reputation in that line (*l'Homme moral*, p. 99), or even his own frequent deprecation of such fame needs some discount. Allowing for the more serious inclinations of age, I should still say that M. was ready till the end to condone, if not to approve, both his work and his wit.

¹ P. 89.² P. 118.³ His use, both of satire and epigram, is less kindly than recommended. Pp. 92, 123).⁴ P. 91.⁵ P. 151, and Meyer, *Com. L. P.*⁶ Sup., p. 150.—A work apparently already talked of among his friends in 1722 (Bolingbroke, *Lettres*, III, 175), though not published until 1726. However, I am not trying to prove an influence.⁷ Jannsen, *Mont's. Theorie . . . zurückgeführt*, and, *per contra*, Pietsch (q. v.).

men have endeavored to convey, certainly nowhere else has Montesquieu succeeded in conveying that humor which is so peculiarly Swiftian : that tone of simple description which hardly takes the reader into its confidence, which baffles him by minuteness in fact, by solemnity in statement, which appalls him by the satire of its ultimate truth. Only, Swift is the elder and more terrible, having far more of gloom and disheartenment than the Frenchman cared to attain.

This much by way of illustration for a certain phase of our author's wit. Another phase—and this time La Bruyère is the precursor—is to be found in the delicate cameo, the finely touched laughable portraits, which so deliciously enliven the *Persanes*. In this connection, it may be remarked that Montesquieu's belief in painting types instead of individual characters¹ is well wrought out in his own creation. Every portrait is as typical as Molière—and as inoffensive.

With his leading characters, he is hardly so happy. He has wished to avoid a “Bajazet naturalisé Français;”² but his own Bajazets would be very weak if considered solely as faithful pictures of Oriental potentates. It may be argued, as he has argued,³ that their occidentalization, proceeding rapidly throughout the book, would naturally progress with the length of their stay in Europe. His “Turks” become passable Christians.⁴ But, in truth, Usbek and Rica, it has often been said, were manufactured as two mouthpieces of two Montesquieus;⁵ and their individual characterization concerned him but little.

An allied point is that of the Oriental coloring. This he obtained, in his opinion, by luxurious harem descriptions,⁶ by the employment of exalted language, expressions “qui auraient ennuyé jusque dans les nues.”⁷ Yet several of his fine passages have the Oriental warmth as a *raison d'être*. As a rule, however, there is a suggestion of irony in the very magnificence and

¹ P. 87.

² P. 46.

³ I, 47, 415.

⁴ P. 87.

⁵ The first as the sage, the second rather as the man of the world.

⁶ He shows imagination, to my thinking, only in these despotic visions (also *Hist. Vérit.*), and in panoramic historical surveys (esp. *G. D. R.*).

⁷ P. 156 ; it may read “envoyé.” (I, 52).

ampollosty of this made-to-order vocabulary. Hyperbole, to which as a Gascon he was sufficiently addicted,¹ comes here into play. The "figured language"² in general, which even Usbek would abjure in itself, the flowery language of compliment are made to contribute their part. With all this, it is of course no real Orient that he depicts, however well it may have satisfied the Regency.

Hyperbole is not the only figure which Montesquieu uses in his normal style. There are epithets and oratorical climaxes.³ There is the dexterous use of detail, making a sort of synecdoche which gives much vividness. There is, most important of all, his fondness for antitheses.

The great principle of contrast,⁴ in its larger relations, has been put to masterly use by Montesquieu. In this very work, there is as essential point of departure, the contrast, evidently designed by the author,⁵ between the Persian point of view and the European setting. Again, the *Romains* is one long sustained antithesis between the *Grandeur* and the *Décadence* of that nation. One may also find, in the *Sylla et Eucrate*, a contrast between the historical brutality of the hero and the dramatic, rhetorical way in which his character is presented. In the *Lettres persanes*, once more, it is the recurring contrast of grave and gay that piques our interest. It may then be conceded that the President could aptly apply the fecund principle in the large.⁶

But how when it comes to details, to such things as parallelism and antithesis? There are several excellent pleas on behalf of true antithesis. It can be alleged, and has been by the philosophers from the days of Socrates to those of Hegel,⁷ that thought

¹ "Nombre innombrable" and "tout l'univers" are favorite expressions.

² P. 155.

³ P. 41. This is both of periods and phrases, with the telling word frequently at the end.

⁴ P. 39.

⁵ I, 49.

⁶ Another excellent example is the continued parallel of the Romans and the Carthaginians in *G. D. R.*, ch. iv.

⁷ Cf. the antithetical method, the antinomies of the Kantian School.

comes by opposition ; that an idea brings as a necessary correlate its logical opposite ; to which it might be added, that, whether or not there is exact contrast of antonyms, each word, as a self, is opposed to others of its kind as non-selves. Hence evolves what seems, from the literary standpoint, a fertile cause of antitheses ; a writer who has chosen one word and rejected several is tempted to put down one of these last as complementary or antithetical to his chosen word. Therefore, philosophically or artistically, the fullest expression of the idea tends to a contrast or balancing in expression. That a sentence may be signally helped in harmony and rhythm by the balancing of its simpler or its complex parts is evident.

This may all be very true, one is tempted to respond ; but what if the antithesis is false, if words are thrown in independently of thought, chiefly to make a rhythmical style ? Montesquieu himself, has made the distinction and has answered this question. Only, one would be disposed to treat more tenderly than he does the case of "false" antithesis. Rhythm in itself is not such a bad thing ; and the two varieties are not always distinguishable, as the philosophic attempts to cover the whole field under Idea may have shown.

One would be so disposed, I say, but for one thing—the antithesis is like the snake of the fable. If once allowed *per se* it is most likely to invade and pervade a whole style, corrupting it from contrast to a "vicious uniformity," driving us to impatience with its frequent recurrence, making us demand whether anything is ever really meant or not.

To return from this excursus, that is exactly what has happened in Montesquieu's own case. In vain he will have only the true antithesis of idea ; in vain he denounces Saint Augustine and St.-Evremond. He is far too fond of Florus and of Cicero. One may discern in his very penetration of the subject, even in his protests, that he realizes half-consciously what a hold the figure has acquired on him.

It is admitted that there are many true antitheses in Montesquieu's writings ; but there are too many of the other kind ; and in either case, since both swell the total amount, the general effect

has been seriously to impair the virtue of his style by monotony. The infection spreads from simple word-antithesis to a balancing of parts, clauses, sentences. When parallelism and sentence-balancing, things beautiful in themselves, become wearisome from repetition, when the antithetical purpose is nakedly evident and its artifice manifest, the principle has clearly gone to seed. The reader stands in a pained attitude of attention, ready to pounce on the next antithesis. He does not have long to wait. He is pleased by what promises to be a gentle and fruitful contrast—he finds himself involved, bemused in a threefold and fourfold antithesis, continuing through an involved sentence, and perhaps balanced by a corresponding sentence to form a perfectly antithetical paragraph. This, of course, is an extreme case. But it is rare that Montesquieu stops with one simple word-antithesis. That would have been too palpably easy.

It has seemed worth while to enlarge on this figure, and its extensions, since it is the most prominent technical element in our writer's style. Its abuse is related to his protests against uniformity and does not conspicuously make for variety. The latter quality is, however, gained for the *Lettres persanes* by the different subjects and tones which characterize successive letters.

As to the construction of the book, it properly has none. The sketchy harem imbroglio is hardly a very strong *chaîne*.¹ The lack of constructive ability, which Montesquieu has elsewhere so signally evidenced, makes less difference here on account of the very nature of letters. He may wander at his own sweet will to any subject and proceed with any development, without seriously marring the symmetry of such a work. There is no beginning, no particular conduct of plot, and a hurried ending—which, however, is sufficiently well brought about.

The episodes, which are certainly distinct stories, are interesting enough. The best seems the story of the Troglodytes, wherein may be partly realized his ideal of antique simplicity.²

The style is rather *sec* and brilliant than flowing. The “asthmatic” sentences seem like successive *étapes*, whose point of

¹ P. 112.

² P. 166.

junction is nowhere. There are few connectives. An event or separate fact is frequently stated in each phrase. This shows already the lack of care for transitions, which will be a later reproach.

There is uniformity again when he begins periods with the same words several times in succession. This is a favorite habit,¹ and with this go the long linked peroratory sentences, with climactic finishes. A more serious reproach is that of occasional crudity, cacophony, bad grammar and obscurity.

When all this has been said—and most of this is not in reprehension—it remains that our author has forged himself a polished and trenchant instrument, flexible for defense, sharp-edged and piercing in attack. His incessant care in perfecting his verbal expression is shown by the successive editions, notably by those published under the care of M. Barckhausen.²

What contributes to this beauty of expression, as much as his grace and finished manner, is the concentrated and powerful force of his vocabulary. Not only is this most striking, but most suggestive,³ containing many a *nuance*, many a felicity and, it must be admitted, many a piece of preciousness. He not only “creates”⁴ his diction at need, but is constantly in the habit of exercising a “gentle pressure” on words to make them give up all that they have of significance and connotation. He has, of course, his favorite expressions,⁵ his hyperboles and Gasconisms. But only in the *Romains* does he surpass the *Persanes* for concision, force and elegance of diction.

In this *chef-d'œuvre* of historical writing—*multum in parvo*—he has merged two historical methods, the philosophic and the panoramic or dramatic.⁶ If at one moment he seems somewhat spectacular,⁷ at the next he is engaged mainly in marshalling

¹ Much more awkward and monotonous in the *Hist. vérit.*

² *L. P., G. D. R., rejet of E. L.* ³ P. 157.

⁴ P. 54. ⁵ Like *redoutable*. ⁶ P. 115.

⁷ A quality much more conspicuous in *S. & E.*, where the grandiose, the Cicero-nian, the *oratoire* tend to dominate. Yet this may become majestic, almost august. The theme is singularly suited to the impressiveness and compact majesty which form one side of his style.

causes, and always his attitude is in the best sense human and “popular.” This he has kept as legacy from his previous worldly influences. *Esprit* and feminism have vanished. But there is still the classic compulsion to throw his thoughts into a shape that may be understood and honored by an audience not specially trained.¹ Both idea and expression are brought within the reach of all, without losing in nobility or impairing the general tone—a reproach which has justly been made against the *Esprit des Lois*.²

The result of the method has been a masterly piece of writing, no less delightful than thoughtful, no less instructive than artistic. It is a very perfect welding of thought and form, and as such would seem to unite the two kinds of books.³ It is true that in the last part, one becomes somewhat confused and weary, less perhaps from Montesquieu’s fault than from the nature of the subject, as he is forced to wander amid the chaotic ruins of the two Empires. But as a complete product, let us note what is now the fully established reign of the general Idea in his mental processes and output.

It is largely because he has been able to grasp the leading principles of every period that he has succeeded in presenting, in such little space, a clear coöordinated view of the whole history of Rome. The work is saved from sketchiness by its aim, which is not narrative. Yet, in order to avoid too abstract and dry a treatment, he has relieved his philosophic view with illustrations and figures⁴ of an extraordinary force, with magnificent and climactic periods, with a suggestive concision, illuminative and felicitous. In his abstracting of the essence from incidents and events, he puts forth generalities which do not glitter but impress. His thought remains on the heights and so does his expression.

For this grave and lofty survey of an empire’s course is clad in a style, equally grave, noble and at times sublime. At its best

¹ P. 175.

² Where, however, he again resorts to *esprit* and the *saugrenu*.

³ P. 184.

⁴ Particularly metaphors and similes—with the already mentioned presentation by detail (p. 190).

it is a stately and harmonious organ-roll, here sonorous in quality, there marked by a proud and dignified phrase, like his own Roman Stoics. This indeed is a fine outcome of his classicism ; a contained and finished modern development of the best Latin prose.¹ Such an effect, however, is seen rather as an inspiring or as a chastening element, than in a way to vitiate and weaken his own individual expression.

Classicism again appears and conspicuously in his choice of vocabulary—and here is the point of union with the *Lettres persanes*. There is the same power of compression and of *nuances*; but his “creation” of diction here is rather along the line of Latinisms. He turns words, if ever so slightly, from their modern to their antique signification, thus recoining them with the Roman stamp.

The concision extends to sentences ; which are again almost too *serrés* and compact. They have at times something of a telegraphic effect, tending to the interjectional, seeming more like notes and jottings.² The paragraphs, too, are not infrequently *hachés* and brief, consisting of a single sentence and having each the air of a separate treatise. Again there is the lack of transitions. Wherever the *Romains* shows aridity and lacks *entrain*, over-conciseness is likely to be the fault.

The paragraphs are marked by another peculiar trait. Their succession is not always thoroughly logical. They hardly succeed one another so much as they grow out in separate stems—each following the former, not as arising from its whole thought, but as suggested by some special thought back in the body of the predecessor. The movement is rather inward than onward. There is thus frequently a feeling of unpleasant suspense and entanglement, without the sense of mental progress.

Such things cannot seriously mar the beauty of the whole. The *Grandeur et Décadence* has well gained its place among the world’s Little Masterpieces. It is one of the prime products of classicism, alike by its supremacy of thought and its beauty of form.

¹ Extending even to Latin construction and the imitating of passages from Tacitus, *et al.*

² All these defects are much more marked in the *E. L.*

It has been too much the fashion to regard this work merely as an antechamber or annex to the spacious halls of the *Esprit des Lois*. The *Romains* is quite capable of standing on its own merits ; and needs perhaps less defence than its more imposing and celebrated rival.

When it comes to the *Esprit des Lois*, one's impulse is first to throw up the hands in bewilderment and stupefaction ; and, secondly, to apologize for presenting cold and categorical conclusions, which it would take hundreds of pages adequately to prove. This work represents Montesquieu in his fourth stage. He has passed through his eras of wordly frivolity,¹ of the union of that and brilliant speculation,² of a combined classical and philosophical conception of history.³ He has now placed himself with tolerable absoluteness on the side of thought, of erudition ; and vast scholastic labors supplant the careful hours formerly devoted to artistic finish.

He himself would claim that he has carried out his precept of "treating sciences delicately."⁴ Many of his critics hold that he has so done and that in so doing he has added another domain to literature. Many others hold, of course, that the literary treatment is incidental, that the mass of fact and theory, legal, political, economic and social, with which the book is surcharged, makes its real value. With the last statement one is inclined to agree—with a difference.

From the literary standpoint, and the present standpoint is necessarily that, the *Esprit des Lois* is a colossal failure. Or, if preferred, it is a *succès d'estime*. This statement is not made without due regret and all circumspection.

For, to consider closely his "delicate treatment," the literary condiments which he has insinuated into the work, which he has added not interfused, represent only a compromise with his condemned principle of ornament.⁵ He has made a hasty, ill-advised and inartistic return to the *ressorts* of *esprit* and licentiousness,

¹ *T. G.*, *V. à P.*

² *L. P.*

³ *G. D. R.*

⁴ A procedure really adopted in several of the *Discourses*.

⁵ Pp. 154-5.

which marked the *Persanes*. Only now, such condiments are more poorly prepared ; and they are markedly out of place in a serious work of jurisprudence and government. Further, he has attempted to relieve his subject, by the insertion of chance *colifichets*, by writing very short chapters, which sometimes contain nothing at all,¹ by a quantity of supernumerary *faits divers*. His belated return to the principle of pleasure, to a desire to amuse, becomes *gauche* and inharmonious in its manifestations.

One might pardon all this, were it not for the main offense against literary presentation that ruins the book : it is lamentably lacking in construction. It is a chaotic mass of good things gone astray. He offends against his every dogma of order and *suite*.² There is no coördinate principle binding the whole ; and his own hypothetical arrangements are clearly not carried out.

This is supported, as Brunetière³ has interestingly shown, by the fact that each successive commentator comes with a different interpretation, a different clue to the maze of the *Esprit des Lois*. All are right, because each principle partly guided Montesquieu in his discussion ; all are wrong, because no principle obtained consistently from beginning to end. The most illuminative, perhaps, of the recent divisions is that of M. Barekhausen.⁴ But will his, or any other clue, correspond with the titles of Montesquieu's books, with the inner development of his chapters ? It might also be said that even if some scheme, both broad and ingenious enough, were found and manipulated to fit the turns and twists of the *trame*'s eccentric development, even then the literary offense is not nullified ; for in a work of this size, the arrangement should be more evidently logical and patent, not requiring the ingenuity of a problem-solver to grasp its divisions.

Granted the confusion, its explanation is not far to seek : the three or four souls and principles which made Montesquieu are each wrestling for the predominance, the victory going to none ;

¹ Bk., VIII, ch. xv. Also, the scattering fire of small paragraphs has more than ever the effect of making his book seem largely a mere collection of notes.

² P. 39.

³ *Manuel*, p. 295 ff.

⁴ *Le Désordre dans l' E. L.*

and in such a vast field, with so enormous an array of material, he has not succeeded in ordering and mastering his forces. There is no vantage-point, sufficiently lofty for either author or reader to obtain a *coup-d'œil* of his chaos.

He has sought such a *point de repère* in his opening book, and has signally failed to find it. As evidence of his little taste for metaphysical thought,¹ his philosophy of laws is notably one of the poorest parts of the work; it has been made a matter of reproach to him that his trend is rather towards opportunism than towards basing a system on some high philosophical or ethical import of laws. They are defined merely as *rapports*.

This conception does not concern us, save in so far as it shows a lack of leading principle. The first book is then a superficial introduction which introduces to nothing that he subsequently writes. His last two books, last four books or last six books—the number varies inversely with the enterprise of the arranger—are likewise conceded to be *hors-d'œuvres* or additions outside of any plan. This again shows the difficulties which the plan-maker has to contend with.

His material overcame him in another way; that is, with reference to style. In contrast to his previous works, the pedestrian quality of this becomes at times marked. He plods on, frequently amid arid wastes, and the aridity penetrates to the founts of inspiration. Consequently, there is the effect of reading a note-book, interjectional jottings that are not artistically expanded and linked.

Yet there are certainly oases. There is usually the old clearness in detail, the careful choice of vocabulary. And there is occasionally the old brilliancy, profundity, strength and charm of statement.² The portrait of Charlemagne,³ even the Invocation,⁴ are instances. It is significant that the famous chapter on the English constitution⁵ has been dwelt on by so many as the notable feature of the book, largely obscuring all the rest.

¹ P. 178.

² The caution must again be made that it is treatment and presentation, not the thought of the work, that concerns us here.

³ VI, 50-1.

⁴ IV, 359-60.

⁵ IV, 7-23.

Episodes and interludes may have their value ; familiar personal expressions may have their charm ;¹ but it is as a whole that the work must be judged. For the scholarly part of it, there can be no doubt that he shows his love of study² and vast knowledge. Even this, however, frequently limits itself to the discovery and recording of stray facts about Bantam, gorillas and the like, *facetiae* which have been much ridiculed. The gravest accusation here is that he does not put into practice that thorough and severe criticism of sources which is his own recommendation.³

Is it too rash to inquire whether, even as to matter, he shows more of genius in the *Esprit des Lois*, or, as he has put it, more of "memory and patience?"⁴ If so, let us remain on the side of "manner" and note that art of writing which he partially condemned finds here its final retribution. It will make us think, but it will with difficulty make us read.⁵ This work is not a masterpiece of literature in the same sense that the *Romains* and the *Lettres persanes* are just that. It may be a masterpiece of jurisprudence, political science, or even of legal and economic history. But a masterpiece of literature, if literature is an art, the *Esprit des Lois* can hardly be esteemed.

If by way of conclusion it be demanded what can be said of Montesquieu's final ranking as an aesthetician, a critic and an artist, something like the following results may be submitted.

As an aesthetician, it is evident that he cannot stand as a theorist of the first water. His system, if system it can be called, lacks coherency and principle. He vibrates between the conflicting standards of beauty and utility, of amusement and thought ; he has no sure touchstone for the discernment of art. Taste itself is for him a very variable matter, and even classicism will not lord it over the whole field of production.

Yet this very uncertainty is a sign of moderation and breadth. He may be called a trimmer or be successively claimed by various

¹ "J'ose le dire," "Il faut que je me fasse jour," etc.

² P. 99 ff.

³ P. 117.

⁴ P. 93.

⁵ P. 22.

aesthetic schools, just as has befallen him in the field of politics. If no whole doctrine has his sympathy, his relativity is in itself worth while, and it will be largely in individual instances, in particular utterances and relations, that his views may be appreciated. Many of his judgments¹ will be found interesting, others are suggestive and even illuminative. He has reasoned where he has not felt.

His taste has been variously judged ; critical opinion on the whole considers its purity not above suspicion. Certainly, it is that part of him on which the influence of the period, of the *salon* particularly, exercised its most detrimental influence. It is to be noted, nevertheless, that most condemnations of his taste refer to his practice alone, and that his theory, as regards such things as ornament, *esprit* and the like, is by far higher. His *goût bizarre* may be ascribed to his age ; his own fine discernment of certain fine things, in antiquity, or in the plastic arts, speaks for itself. Taste, he would claim, is relative. His own, which is not always *fade* and false, is usually that of the *raffiné* and of the man of the world, rather than of the artist.

As a critic, he is again systemless, which, according to Faguet, is the true mark of the broad and impartial critic, enabling him to enter freely into every man's point of view.² His lack of leading principle is much less reprehensible here than where he would theorize aesthetically ; here, indeed, it rather enhances the value of his judgments. These literary judgments have been quoted and honored by many, especially by Ste-Beuve.³ They are in truth, since individual judgments are now the thing required, of proportionately more interest and value than his other aesthetic deliverances. It will not of course do to depend very thoroughly on Montesquieu's estimate of an author ; but that estimate may well help us in coming to a conclusion, especially when—and this gives his surer value—he voices, as he frequently does, the sentiment of his age or pronounces upon its authors.

¹ *Sup.*, Book II.

² *XVIII^e siècle*, p. 162—“un livre de critique divinatrice, voilà l'E. L.” This is not exactly literary criticism.

³ Brunetière finds more to condemn (*Et. crit.*, p. 248).

How then, it may be asked, could the President be so summarily dealt with in histories of criticism like those of Brunetière and Saintsbury? Because, it might be divined, systems in these works have necessarily the prime place, and a system is just what Montesquieu lacked.¹ This lack, however, this trimming, may itself assume not only a neutral but a positive value, when it comes to his own fine protests against destructive criticism, his view of the critic's enlightening mission—precepts which he has in the main followed practically.

It remains to decide whether or not he was a man of letters and an artist. For the first, his intimate knowledge of the profession, his evident vocation for it, seems to point in a different direction from his plainly expressed dislike and distrust thereof. His contempt for mere authors, for poets and critics especially, his condemnation of books, are not in favor of a high reverence for his calling. He was more or less ashamed of his *métier*. He was too much of an aristocrat to be a thorough *littérateur*. Yet his lifelong devotion, his absorption in his task declare the vocation, whether or not he would admit it. He was a man of letters *malgré lui*.

That of itself hardly tends to prove him an artist. What further militates against this conception, is his lack of imagination and sentiment, of a feeling for beauty, poetry and nature. For doctrine, he interests himself in abstractions, in the plastic arts, he loves antiquity; but the first is the intellectual, analytical interest, the second is the taste rather of the cultured amateur, not of the *connaisseur*, and for the third he recognized sufficiently well that the Romans were not poetically sensible nor artistically supreme. For practice, his corrections and care of vocabulary, his best and most brilliant sentences, passages, figures and finish, would pronounce him of the craft; but powerlessness of construction, of narration, descent in tone and a fondness for paste jewels leave one in doubt. The best arguments for him are based

¹ It may also be said that such works could deal only with an adequate body of doctrine, and Montesquieu furnished hardly sufficient material before the publication of the *P. & F.*

on his sense of the antique, the primeval simplicity, when really he shows a “pointe de poésie;”¹ on his care for words; and, more boldly, on his adaptation of his declared purpose to “faire un art de la raison même.”² If there can be an art wholly of the head, concerned with the creation and manipulation of ideas, he has achieved that art. Its accomplishment brought him nearer the lyric transport than anything he has known.³

He was an artist in so far as a cultivated gentleman, in so far as a thinker of great and catholic intelligence is bound to have some appreciation of artistic matters. He is a creator of ideas and a verbal artist of a rare order. But an artist in the subtle, manifold, perfect sense of the word, he was not, and could never be.

This is not to deny that he was many other things. I should feel that this study would be altogether too specialized, were it ended without one more tribute to the Titanic intelligence and the pervasive influence, the very human charm of the President. Great as he could be in an age where ideal greatness was unknown, great morally despite his concessions, and intellectually despite recent detractions, he has welded his world and that of some antique or yet unborn vision into an unparalleled region, whose atmosphere clarifies and heartens those who have the fortune to dwell with him for a space. It is much that he has touched few points of social history which he has not adorned, that he has become the wise moderator as well as the legislator of nations, that he has promoted the welfare of half the civilized governments on the globe, that he has come to his own in every land of liberty. It is not altogether his fault that he could not live in Arcady—nor yet in Bohemia.

¹ Schérer, *Études*, ix, 251.

² P. 50.

³ *Invocation* (iv, 359)—Faguet, pp. 190–1.

VITA.

Edwin Preston Dargan was born on the 7th of September, 1879, in Orange County, Virginia, where he spent his early years. He received his secondary education at the High Schools of Charleston, S. C., and of Louisville, Ky., taking the bacheloretate degree from Bethel College, Russellville, Ky., in June 1899. He then went to the University of Virginia, where he remained three years, taking largely graduate courses in the modern languages and literatures, teaching, during the last of these years, at the Rawlings Institute in Charlottesville.

The fifteen months from June 1902 to September 1903 were spent abroad, principally at Berlin, Rome and Paris, where some knowledge of the spoken languages was gained. Three years have been passed in the Romance Department of the Johns Hopkins University. The writer has studied French as a major subject, Italian and Spanish as first and second minors respectively; he has held a Virginia scholarship during the first two years, and the fellowship of the Department this final year. The summer of 1905 was spent in the libraries of Paris in the collection of material for the present dissertation.

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